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shadow

WARNING

this fanfiction, as a warrior cats book, contains themes such as gore, death, murder, and manipulation. if you're not comfortable with these topics, please click away.

CREDITS

i don't own any of the photos used. the photo on the cover doesn't belong to me, although i did create the cover. the general idea of warrior cats belongs to the erin hunter team. however, the plot of the story, along with the characters and clans, are owned by me.

~~~

"what gives you power?"

SHADOW

"respect?"

BY

"that's foolish."

LILY [_patches]

"you gain power when you have things others love. you gain power when you're *feared*."

~~~

hello! i'm lily! welcome to shadow! this is a book i've been planning for a while now, so i'm super excited to be able to share it with you!

but, before you begin reading, i'd like to go over a few things, to help clear up some confusion you may have!

first, the book will be going between real life and flashbacks. there will be a little divider between flashback and real life, if it helps clear up any confusion, and the first couple of words in the flashback will be bolded! same thing for real life, when the book gets out of flashback. also, i will put some marks at the chapter title to indicate flashback or real life! for example, if the chapter has an 'f' beside it, then it means the entire thing is a flashback! if a 'p' then it means real life, or present time. with both, then there's both flashback and present time. and, whichever letter is first is what the chapter starts with! like, if the 'p' is in front then the chapter starts at present time! hopefully that makes sense! if not, i'd be happy to answer any questions!

second, the way the clans work is much different then the original clans! but, there will be a chapter on this to introduce the clan to you guys!

i try to proofread and edit every chapter before i release it, but i might've missed a few things! feel free to point those out, i always welcome constructive criticism! just please be nice about it!

that's all i had to say! happy reading!

~ lily

warclan

"i'm going to kill you, and kill you again."

"your last breath will be gasped beneath my paws. your last drop of blood will be spilled on my fur."

"this is how clan cats fight."

WELCOME TO WARCLAN

warclan is a clan that lives by themselves in a dark oak forest, besides a plain. they hunt woodland creatures, such as mice, shrews, and voles, along with moor animals, like rabbits. they fight amongst themselves a lot. their most popular landmark is the hollow of blood; any arguments are always settled with fighting, even if it was something small, like who gets the mouse.

at the end of every apprentices' training, they go to the hollow of blood and fight each other. some, although highly unlikely, are killed during the tradition, but the ones that survive are then ranked by how well they fought.

the highest rank, other than leader, is top assassin. then, assassin, and the last rank lowpaw. cats are only allowed to mate with those in their ranks, and the leadership is passed on within the family. but, the heir to the throne must be a top assassin first. so, if the leader's chosen heir turns out to be an assassin or lowpaw instead, they must pass the leadership on to another one of their kits or a kin, who does have the rank of top assassin.

within the ranks, there are roles: killer, spy, and defense. spy keeps an eye on the borders, hiding within the bushes; killer, and since warclan lives by themselves, mainly just hunts. however, if a group of rogues approach, killers are sent to take care of them; defense stays inside the camp, leaving only to collect supplies to build the dens and camp. if, somehow, enemies break into the camp, defense is the backup to drive them out.

apprentices don't have only one mentor. they are assigned three; killer, spy, and defense, so they can learn which role is more suited for them. because of this, apprentices and their mentors aren't normally very close.

WARCLAN'S LEADERSHIP

warclan was led solely by one cat; their leader. the leader's word is law, in which every cat must obey, even if they find it unreasonable. the only way to end a cat's leadership is their death.

if one cat disapproves of their leader and thinks they can do better, they may challenge their leader and fight for the throne. this fight takes place in the hollow of blood, where all official battles are. this is a fight to the death; if the challenger wins, they become the leader. if the leader wins, then they've managed to defend their throne.

the only other way to dethrone the leader is by their death; then, the successor would take over. the leader's successor is chosen by the leader themselves, but the heir must be one that shares the leader's blood. the leader has the power to change the heir overtime if they'd like.

most leaderships remain in one family for generations until another cat decides to challenge them. then, the leadership is switched to another family.

FOUNDER OF WARCLAN

a cat by the name of death founded warclan. he was a vicious and bloodthirsty cat, founding the clan for the sole purpose of more power. more cats to fight for him. more cats to serve him. more land for him to take.

cats joined warclan simply because they were scared. even before warclan's founding, death was already a cat who pretty much ruled the forest. every cat wanted to be on his good side. so, when he announced the beginnings of warclan, cats jumped up at the offer, joining instantly. the rest who pondered on it eventually, seeing as warclan grew and grew, joined as well. the ones that didn't were

either killed or kicked out of the forest.

although death held a lot of power, no cat liked him. they only pretended to because he was scary. he'd take the things they loved and use it against them. for example, one of his common threats was threatening to kill a cat's kits or mate. that cat, in return, would do anything to keep them safe, and do whatever death ordered.

one night, the cats had enough. a tabby tom, brave, stepped up to challenge death. he was younger and less experienced than death was, but he didn't care; all he knew was that he had to win. for the sake of warclan, a clan they'd grown to love even if the leader was hated.

death, crackling, accepted. but, with a twist of events, brave fought much harder than death expected, killing warclan's founder. as death fell to the ground, brave lashed his tail, declaring that death's kin must die, too. no trace of death should ever exist.

terrified, death's mate, silver, snatched up their two kits, oak and dapple, and bounded out of the camp as fast as she could go. legend says that they never caught her. she was the fastest cat within the clan, even with kits. they had no idea where she had went. all they knew was that she'd disappeared into the night. gone, hopefully, forever.

prologue

fallen death

~~~

THE HALLOW OF BLOOD, an area tucked away in the deepest parts of WarClan's dark oak forest. The rocky walls and trees that surround it are imprinted with the desperate shrieks of the fallen, echoes of their begs for mercy, its ground tainted with their blood. An arena that assures a fight to the death.

It's a horrible method of punishment and to fight for leadership, implementing the most perfect means of control: fear. Nobody would dare speak against the leader in fear of being sent into the Hallow of Blood; and even if they're stupid enough to complain, if they think themselves brave enough to resist the system of WarClan, all they'll do is fall into the workings of the hallow.

Because as soon as they're presented with the cruel reality of death, they'll undoubtedly choose to save their own pelts and do whatever's needed if it means survival. And once they've felt a Clanmate's blood in their claws and see the eyes of their closest friend start to fade, they'll never complain again.

Silver realized long ago that she's drawn to the idea. She knew how alarming that is, and she accepted long ago that she didn't care. The system was so perfectly woven, so impossibly underminable, that rather than cowering in fear at the hallow's mention, her pelt twitched with interest.

Perhaps that's also why she found herself drawn to the creator of the Hallow of Blood, the founder of WarClan himself. Death, a fitting name for the most feared cat in the forest. His reputation contained nothing but warnings, a cat who was willing to do whatever it took to succeed, a cat who built the most powerful Clan around in a moon. His strategy was quite simple: join WarClan, or die. An easy enough decision for most.
~~~

It was no surprise when Silver's interest turned from the system's workings towards seeking power for herself. How was she meant to not fall into the trap that'd captured countless Clanmates? To stay at the top? Well, the answer seemed obvious to her.

Death needed a mate. A beautiful mate who'd give him handsome kits.

It wasn't like Silver didn't have competition. Plenty of she-cats volunteered, believing this was a surefire way out of danger. But Silver was ready to win. A nick in the leg, some phycological psych-outs, and a few deathberries did the trick. Don't judge her, she did what she had to do.

If she's being completely honest, that's probably why Death chose her. He'd seen the greed in her eyes that was present in no other's. A few seasons later, Silver's the mother to two kits. Oak, a tom-kit with a pelt as dark as his father's; Dapple, a pretty she-kit with her mother's innocent blue eyes. She'd given Death his perfect heirs, and he'd given her her power.

Silver thought it was a fine but *delicate* relationship. She used to remember that, used to stay on her guard. But she'd gotten comfortable that night, and had forgotten everything could topple at any given moment.

That night was dark. Thick, stormy clouds covered the moon, and a breeze that drifted by Silver's nose brought her news of rain. But if anyone else sensed this, they all seemed unconcerned; it felt as though every cat in WarClan were out in the camp's clearing at the moment, passing whispered secrets in their huddles.

"Look at them." Death's voice came from behind Silver, softly, and the she-cat craned her neck to look at her mate. "I love when they get like this."

"Like what?"

The black tom jerked his head at the whispering cats. "Like this. They're acting like mice." He took a deep breath, as though he's reveling in it. "This is what *winning* feels like."

Silver thought that was awfully dramatic, but she didn't say so. "They're upset, Death. They'll get desperate, and desperate cats are dangerous."

"Not *these* cats. These cats couldn't separate a mouse from a vole, much less fight *me*."

Silver hated when he got like this. Too overconfident. "*Any* cat," she meowed sharply. "Any cat can be dangerous."

"You worry too much," Death replied darkly. He glanced down, where Silver's curled around their two sleeping kits. "Bring Oak and Dapple inside. I smell rain."

The silver she-cat bristled at his commanding tone, but didn't argue. "Fine." She was just about to tap Oak awake when the sound of approaching paw steps stopped her.

Silver and Death both glanced over at the same time to spot a brown tabby tom by the name of Brave. A foolish name for such a mousehearted cat, in Silver's opinion. But she had to give him credit that he had some courage, considering he wasn't bolting under Death's brooding gaze.

That credit was quickly torn away when he spoke with a quivering voice. "Death. I'd like to challenge you for the rank of leader."

Silver was having trouble resisting a laugh, and Death wasn't even trying to contain his amusement. It's obvious to anyone that he found the situation quite funny judging by his twitching whiskers. "You?"

Brave lifted his chin as gallantly as he could. "Yes, I believe I have ideas to make this Clan better."

"Do you?" Death took a step forward, his large frame now towering over the smaller tom. "And you believe those ideas are worth risking your life?"

Now's usually when any challengers back down, but Brave stood strong. "I do."

Silver should've stopped him. She could've, she knows for certain she could've. Something as easy as "Sorry, the kits need their father tonight" or "Tonight's too dark, maybe a full moon would be better" could've put an end to the whole thing. Brave's already standing on trembling legs, it wouldn't have taken much of an excuse for him to quit. But she remained quiet. She'd believed the brown tabby was no match for her mate.

"Very well." Death flicked his tail, his features twisted into mean, mocking amusement. "Shall we head to the Hallow of Blood?"

Brave nodded, and as the two started out of camp side-by-side, Silver scrambled to her paws. She wanted to see this.

Quickly, Silver shuffled her kits to shelter in case it started raining before following her Clanmates to the hallow. She received several hostile looks along the trip, but she ignored them with ease. She'd gotten used to it.

Upon arriving at the hallow, the silver she-cat leaped lightly onto a large boulder that overlooked the arena. Brave and Death had already taken their positions - each on one side of the clearing - as the cats of WarClan gathered around to watch the show. Everyone was whispering at first, worried words passed among friends, but everything fell to a chilling silence when Brave spoke.

"I, Brave, challenge Death for the leadership of WarClan," the tabby tom meowed. His voice was now firm, as though he'd accepted his fate.

Death, on the other paw, is still viewing this as nothing more than a brief walk. "And I, Death, accept your challenge and shall fight to keep the leadership."

Then the two jumped at each other.

As expected, Death is winning. The black tom crushed into the smaller cat, knocking him over, his powerful blows landing one after the other on Brave. Silver felt her jaws part in a yawn as her gaze scanned the panicked expressions of Brave's kin. *It's almost boring to watch.*

But suddenly, a beam of light flashed from the dark trees. A Twoleg contraption of some sort, it had to be, there's nothing in nature that would be this bright. Silver's certain of that fact as she hissed in agitation and glanced away.

That light blinded every living thing that was in its path. And unfortunately, Death was in its path.

The black tom froze, unable to see, and Brave took his chance. As the Twoleg light turned turned away to other parts of the forest, a loud thud came from the hallow.

Silver didn't believe it at first. She couldn't believe it. But her body knew what'd happened, knew what was going to happen, and she felt herself leap to her paws as her mind slowly processed everything.

Brave was going to kill Death. Brave was going to win. And after that, WarClan would come for her and her kits.

She stumbled off the boulder blindly, still dazed from the light. As soon as she got her bearings, though, she raced towards camp, paws skimming the ground. The horrible yowl of victory that rang up into the air shortly after confirmed her prediction.

Silver pushed herself to go faster.

Bursting into camp, she darted into the shelter she'd left her kits, grabbing them by the scruff roughly. They snapped awake as they were lifted into the air, but the silver she-cat shushed them as she hurried out of camp and crouched within the shadow of a nearby boulder, watching everything play out.

It wasn't long before the rest of WarClan came running, cheering their new leader's name.

"Brave! Brave!" The chant rose up into the air.

"Brave shall be our new leader!"

"Down with Death!"

"Brave has saved us all!"

The whole herd of them, bounding towards camp, yowling happily amongst themselves. They'd been scared, desperate, and now, they were hopeful. Hopeful for a better future.

Brave was in the lead, his tail lashing triumphantly. "We must rid WarClan of Death's kin!" His voice split the air. "Find Silver and the kits!"

Silver's lips pulled back into a snarl as the sound of her den being ransacked echoed through the air. Here she was, very well moments away from the end of her life, but all she couldn't get herself to move, frozen with pure fury. The things she'd worked so hard for, gone in the blink of an eye.

One day, Death's kin will return. She looked down at her quivering kits, wrapping a paw around them to keep silence. *One day, they'll fight for the throne. And one day, they* will *rule WarClan again.*

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here's a little backstory to warclan, hopefully it'll help explain the rest of the story a little more!

thank you for reading! i really appreciate that! feedback is welcomed!

~ lily
~~~

allegiances

WARCLAN

leader
Rattlesnake || brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

warriors

top assassins
Crow || black she-cat with green eyes
role; spy
apprentice; Ivy

Falcon || white tom with sharp amber eyes
role; killer
apprentice; Scorpion

Blossom || ginger-and-white she-cat with blue eyes
role; defender

Night || black tom with speckles of white; orange eyes
role; spy

Frostbite || white she-cat with pale blue eyes
role; killer
apprentice; Leaf

assassin
Snow || gray-and-white she-cat with amber eyes
role; defender
apprentice; Leaf

Snake || black tom with green eyes
role; killer

Eagle || brown tom with orange eyes
role; defender
apprentice; Scorpion

Fire || bright ginger she-cat with green eyes
role; killer

Shade || gray tom with green eyes
role; spy
apprentice; Scorpion

lowpaw
Pebble || tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow-green eyes
role; spy
apprentice; Leaf

Bee || yellow striped tom with orange eyes
role; defender
apprentice; Ivy

Spot || black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes
role; killer
apprentice; Ivy

Nettle || brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
role; spy

Misty || gray she-cat with a white chest and paws; blue eyes
role; killer

apprentices

Scorpion || light brown tabby tom with green eyes

Ivy || black she-cat with amber eyes

Leaf || brown-and-white she-cat with sage green eyes

queens & kits

Crow || black she-cat with green eyes
kits; Venom || black she-cat with amber eyes & Hemlock || black

tom with yellow eyes

Flower || ginger she-cat with green eyes
kits; Flame || ginger-and-white tom with blue eyes & Light || pale ginger she-cat with amber eyes & Bumble || yellow tom with black stripes and green eyes

elders

Mouse || brown tom with amber eyes
former lowpaw; defender

Flicker || black-and-white tom with green eyes
former assassin; killer

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PEACECLAN

leader
Venom || black she-cat with amber eyes

healers
Tree || brown tabby tom with green eyes

Heather || black-and-white she-cat with amber eyes

warriors

highclaw
Rose || pale ginger she-cat with green eyes
role; hunter

Cobra || brown-and-white tom with amber eyes
role; combatant

Frost || white she-cat with green eyes
role; hunter
apprentice; Lion

middleclaw
Cloud || white tom with amber eyes
~~~

role; protector

Feather || silver she-cat with blue eyes
role; hunter

Dark || black tom with amber eyes
role; combatant

Vine || yellow tabby tom with orange eyes
role; protector
apprentice; Lion

lowclaw
Grass || brown-and-white tom with green eyes
role; combatant
apprentice; Lion

Sun || ginger tom with blue eyes
role; protector

Flicker || tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
role; hunter

apprentice

Lion || ginger tom with amber eyes

queens & kits

kit; Storm || gray she-cat with green eyes

elders

n/a

~~~

OUT OF CLANS

Hawk || gray tom with white paws and blue eyes

Dove || white she-cat with green eyes
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the warclan allegiance is the one in previous time (flashback), meaning that right now, in present time, warclan's allegiance would look much different! peaceclan's, though, along with the cats out of clans, is the present time one. i know this might be really complicated and confusing, so if you are confused, feel free to ask questions!
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chapter 1 || p & f

the beginning of the end

~~~

THE SCENT OF RAIN lay in the air thickly as a group of cats padded through the woods, paw steps light. In the lead was a black she-cat, with amber eyes as sharp as claws that scanned the nearby trees as they traveled. Despite her small size, it's clear that she's the leader; every now and then, the cats in the patrol would glance almost nervously toward her.

In fact, a few felines in the back had their heads ducked together, whispering and looking the black she-cat's way more frequently than others. Finally, after countless nudges, a pale ginger she-cat was chosen as the one to approach their leader, and so she picked up her pace and bounded to the black she-cat's side.

"Venom?"

Despite hearing her Clanmate's call, Venom didn't slow her pace. "What is it, Rose?"

Rose looked nervous when she answered. "Well, it seems like a storm's coming-"

"My nose isn't that poor," Venom meowed, eyes pinned forwards. "I can smell the rain."

"Oh-" The ginger she-cat's pelt fluffed with embarrassment. "Of course you can. I'm not saying you can't. I'm just saying that-"

"Spirits, calm down. I was only pulling your tail, I know you'd never say something like that." Venom glanced over at Rose for the first time, flicking her tail in a friendly manner at the latter's ears. "You're too easy to mess with."

The black she-cat's words are lighthearted, so there must be
~~~

something in Venom's amber eyes that made Rose back away a little uneasily, despite the fact that the ginger she-cat did so with a small smile on her face. "Right. Sorry."

Venom waved her apology off with a twitch of her pelt. It seemed like she wasn't angry, that everything's okay, when the black she-cat suddenly stopped and turned around to address the entire patrol. "Is anyone else tired? Would anyone else other than Rose like a break?"

The pale ginger she-cat's ears stood up in embarrassment. "No, Venom, I don't need-"

"Because you're always welcome to it," Venom continued, ignoring her. "You can stop and sit down at any time while the rest of us continue forward to defend our Clan's honor."

She lifted her chin, as though waiting for someone to tap out, but no cat did; instead, several of them cast ashamed looks to the ground.

Venom twitched her pelt. "Very well." She faced forward and as the patrol started up again, she meowed in a low voice to Rose, "Anything else you need?"

Rose shook her head immediately. "No, I'm sorry, Venom. I love PeaceClan, I promise I'm willing to defend its honor. I wasn't trying to suggest that I wouldn't."

"I know." The black she-cat gave Rose what could be interpreted as a forgiving look, but again made the latter's pelt twitch with unease. "I know you would, you're one of my most loyal warriors. What made you think I'd view you as anything else?"

The pale ginger she-cat opened her mouth and closed it as she tried forming a sentence. "Nothing. I'm sorry."

"Then stop apologizing. Otherwise you'll seem weak, and therefore PeaceClan will seem weak." Venom then glanced over her shoulder at the patrol and raised her voice, not bothering to wait for Rose's response. "Hawk and Dove's nest are up front. Do we all remember the plan?"

She didn't receive a verbal answer, but all of her warriors nodded their heads and swished their tails in acknowledgment, looking very eager to prove themselves after the scolding.

Before long, a yew bush came into sight, and as they neared it, Venom twitched her ears, signaling for her patrol to fan out around the den, blocking off all means of escape. Once everyone's in position, she padded to the entrance. "Hawk. Dove." Her voice carried clearly into the bush, and a moment later, a gray tom and white she-cat scrambled out.

The white she-cat flinched at the sight of PeaceClan's warriors while her mate stood strong and lifted his muzzle. However, when he spoke, his quivering voice gave away his fear. "Greetings, Venom. What can we do for you?"

The black she-cat glanced around. Spirits, she *loved* this. Loved how the eyes of her prepared Clanmates were trained on her with full trust, ready to spring at her order. Loved how scared the two cats in front of her looked, knowing they may die in a matter of seconds.

"Don't play dumb with me, Hawk, we both know you're smarter than that." Her voice was quiet but held a taunting undertone. "Where's the prey? I asked for three mice and a thrush, and all I see in front of me are two cats that're about to become crowfood."

"Give us some more time," Hawk meowed pleadingly. "It's hard to catch so much prey during leafbare, especially since we're not allowed to hunt on certain parts of the forest-"

"*PeaceClan's territory*," Venom interrupted harshly. "You're not allowed to hunt on PeaceClan's territory. You're lucky we let you stay here at all."

Dove finally seemed to have gained some courage and spoke up, eyes blazing with anger. "We've lived here our whole lives!" she shrilled, white pelt bristled. "You've got no right-"

"She says we haven't got the right." The black she-cat laughed, a cold, ungenuine sound that sent chills down others' spines. "She says we haven't got the right." Venom looked around at her

Clanmates. "What do you all think?"

Around the circle, she can spot her warriors lashing their tails angrily, glaring at Hawk and Dove; beside her, Rose pulled her lips back into a snarl. Good. They're agitated.

Venom twitched her ears. "We've tolerated your presence on our land for too long."

Hawk's eyes widened, realizing what was about to happen. "Venom," he meowed desperately, "please-"

But his plea was cut off by the black she-cat's low, icy voice.

"Kill them."

~~~

"KILL HIM!" Light's voice bounced off the walls of WarClan's nursery as the pale ginger she-kit leaped onto the back of her brother, Bumble. "Kill the badger!"

Her last littermate, Flame, charged forward with a look of pure joy in his blue eyes as he batted playfully at Bumble as well. "Get away from WarClan!"

Bumble fluffed his fur. Despite being the smallest of his three littermates, he still attempted to play the role of a badger to the best of his ability. "I'm going to eat all of you!"

As their play fight continued, happy purrs from the game rang up into the air and - across the den - Venom watched from her mother's nest in bitter jealousy. Watching them, she was harshly reminded of how she and her own littermate, Hemlock, weren't nearly as close as Light, Bumble, and Flame were. Whereas other kits played with their siblings, Hemlock hardly says more than a word to her per day.

The black she-kit laid her head on her paws, bored and miserable. *Where is Hemlock, anyway?* Almost instantly, she wanted to scratch herself for asking such a stupid question. Hemlock's probably getting attention from Crow and Rattlesnake. When is he not?
~~~

Venom had never received much attention from her parents. She'd learned that pretty quickly; it wasn't like her parents were trying to hide the fact they preferred her brother over her. Crow often brought Hemlock prey, cooing over him, but never her. Rattlesnake, an unaffectionate and distant father for the most part, would come check up on Hemlock once in a while, but never her. It was like her parents had picked Hemlock as their favorite kit as soon as the litter was born.

Needless to say, her and Hemlock were about as close as a fox and a badger. It wasn't like Venom despised her brother - she'd tried play fighting with him once, and had gotten shooed away by Crow instantly, saying that Hemlock needed to rest.

Venom had never tried again.

Sighing, the black she-kit found her eyes drifting to the nursery's exit, trying to find something that may interest her, and her eyes caught onto a familiar brown pelt. *Scorpion!* Her heart lifted almost instantly when she spotted her older brother.

Venom jumped to her paws and scrambled outside the nursery, eager to greet her favorite cat in the world. Scorpion was the only one who'd play with her, who'd give her any sort of attention.

Her means to approach him was stopped when she spotted a brown-and-white she-cat trot up to him. *Leaf.* Even from far away, Venom could see her brother's eyes light up as Leaf neared him, and felt a teasing purr rise in her throat.

It was incredibly obvious to everyone in WarClan that Scorpion and Leaf liked each other. Scorpion had been padding after the brown-and-white she-cat since they were kits, and his attempts didn't slow after they became apprentices. With their promotion to warriors approaching rapidly, Venom felt certain her brother would ask Leaf to be his mate as soon as they completed their training.

But, as she watched the two interact, she felt her pelt prick with confusion. Something seemed off. Leaf looked... *mad* at Scorpion. Her ears were pressed to her head, and she was hissing angrily at the brown tom. The latter looked very apologetic, but Leaf wasn't

interested in what he had to say; she spun around sharply and raced out of the camp into the forest.

Venom's ears twitched, puzzled. She watched as Scorpion cast a sad look after Leaf but didn't chase. Wanting to cheer up her brother with the only way she knew how, she bounded forward and headbutted his hind legs.

When her older brother's warm green gaze turned down to her, the black she-kit put on the brightest smile she could manage. "Want to play?"

~~~

baboom, chapter 1's done! thoughts on any of the characters introduced? i'd love to hear what you think of venom, especially!! any guesses on how she got the way she was? what do you think happened?

also, i know this is probably *super* confusing right now. to clear up some confusion (hopefully) the bit at the top is present time, and the bottom half is flashback. flashback is when venom's still a kit and present time is her as an adult. hopefully any questions you have will be cleared up as you read!

if you have any questions, feel free to ask!

constructive criticism is appreciated! thanks!

~ lily
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chapter 2 || f & p

a dark motive

~~~

Scorpion gazed down at the small black kit. Pain was speckled in his green eyes, but only for a second as he pushed it away, giving her a light smile. "Sure."

Venom gave an excited little bounce. She wasn't sure what had happened with her brother and Leaf - the way Leaf stormed out of camp made it look as if she *hated* Scorpion, which confused the black kit immensely. Leaf and Scorpion were as close as could be. What could've caused such an argument?

Gazing at her brother, Venom noticed speckles of pain inside the brown tom's eyes. What had happened?

Shaking those thoughts out of her mind, Venom crouched down, beginning the play-fight with a small growl. She jumped onto Scorpion's back, batting at the brown tom's back. Her brother pretended to collapse and fell to the ground, careful not to hurt her in the process. Squealing with joy, Venom turned around and tackled the Scorpion again, the two rolling around happily.

Purrs rose from both cats as they played, batting lightly at one another. Venom's tail was high in the air with joy as she gave a mighty leap, landing softly on Scorpion, bowling the brown tom over. Her tail lashed triumphantly in the air. "I win!"

"So it seems you did," Scorpion purred, batting his sister off.

Venom puffed out her chest, proud that she was able to cheer her brother up. The question of what had happened between him and Leaf still whirled in the black kit's mind. She opened her jaws to ask, but before a single word could escape, she was interrupted by an obnoxious yowl.
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"Father just made *me* the heir!"

Venom glanced to the side, spotting her littermate, Hemlock. His yellow eyes beamed as he made his way to his siblings, lashing his tail.

"*What?*" Shock ran through Venom's veins.

Their father, Rattlesnake, was the leader of WarClan. Therefore, one of his kits was the heir to WarClan's throne, the one that'd take over when he died. But, for as long as Venom could remember, the heir was Scorpion, not Hemlock. Why'd her father change it? Her littermate must be boating.

"You heard me!" Hemlock snickered. "Guess who's the favorite, Venom? Not you, that's for sure!" He let out a chortling laugh. "Father and Mother both like me better than you! And Scorpion, too! Why else would they make me the heir? Clearly *I'm* the favorite!"

Confusion wound around Venom. Too much had happened too quickly. First, Leaf and Scorpion have an argument. Then, Hemlock becomes the heir instead of Scorpion. What had Scorpion done to deserve all this?

"Go away, Hemlock," Scorpion meowed, pelt ruffling as he pushed the black tom gently with his tail.

Hemlock's yellow eyes glowed with glee and mock. "Don't feel too bad, Scorpion. I'm sure you'll make a... decent warrior when you grow up. Can't say the same for you, Venom," the black tom added with a sneer. "Well! I'd best get going now. Mother and Father want to talk to me about leadership responsibilities." With a whisk of his tail, Hemlock turned around and stalked away.

Venom faced Scorpion with disbelief. "Why did Father make Hemlock the heir so suddenly? It's always been you! It makes no sense that he'd change it!"

"Well..." Scorpion looked uncomfortable. "I made a mistake."

"A mistake?" Venom echoed.

The light brown tabby nodded. "Yes, and Father's very mad at me. I suppose that's why he changed the heir from me to Hemlock."

The black she-kit was conflicted. Part of her felt sorry for Scorpion, with a digging curiosity of what he'd done, and the other part was sparking with jealousy that between the options of her and Hemlock, her father had chosen her brother instead. However, Venom wasn't too surprised.

"So," the black kit prompted, "what'd you do?"

Scorpion winced. "You know our family secret?"

"Uh-huh?" Venom leaned closer, ears flicked, interested.

Venom's family was descended from the founder of WarClan, Death. Her ancestors, after being exiled, had made their way back into the camp and fought for the leadership. But, of course, no cat knew they were Death's descendants. And the family had kept the secret within them; if you weren't blood-related, you didn't know the secret. Even Crow, who'd mated into the family, was kept in the dark from this.

"Well... I may have mentioned it to Leaf..." Scorpion sighed. "You know how much reputation means to Father. If word about the secret got out, our entire family would be ruined."

Venom felt shock bursting through her. "Wait, go back," she mewed. "You *told Leaf*?"

"I just didn't like the idea of keeping this away from her!" Scorpion lashed his tail. "It didn't seem right!"

"And how did Father find out?"

"He overheard the conversation."

"Oh," Venom breathed. "No wonder she looked so mad at you." Death was a very much hated cat in WarClan. His descendants certainly wouldn't be spared from that judgement.

Scorpion flinched at the mention. "Well, there's nothing much I can

do to fix this."

"No, but Father will still be mad at you," the black she-kit pointed out. "He's not just going to let you slide with switching the heir. He's going to hurt you somehow."

Scorpion chuckled. "I'll be fine, Venom, I promise." His tail-tip brushed her head fondly.

Venom couldn't push away the unease squirming at her belly. Scorpion wasn't going to be okay. Rattlesnake definitely isn't finished with his punishments. Before the black she-kit could say any more, the entrance of the camp rustled. One of WarClan's cats, Nettle, bounded into the camp, his yellow eyes wide as he delivered his news.

"Leaf is *dead*!"

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"DOVE IS *DEAD*!"

Hawk's wail rose into the air, echoing through the den. Venom stood before him, unsympathetic, her tail-tip twitching as her warriors surrounded the gray tom. His blue eyes blazed with grief and fury as he glared at the black she-cat. "Is this what you wanted?"

Venom chuckled. Clearly, Hawk, although threatened, hadn't expected her to kill any of them. *How pathetic*. "Indeed it is. I believe you remember my warning, no? I gave you an entire night to take your family and leave. But you didn't. So you're simply suffering the consequences."

She gave a tight nod to one of her warriors, Feather. The silver she-cat jumped onto Hawk's back, claws sinking into his neck, killing him swiftly.

With a swift flick of her tail in praise, Venom turned around, indicating for her cats to leave the den. Just as she herself was about to step out, she heard a mewl of fear come from underneath a clump of moss. Whipping around, Venom nosed the moss aside,
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finding a small gray she-kit. Hawk and Dove's kit.

She was tiny, that was undeniable. There was no way that she'd survive even a day without her parents. Chuckling, Venom lifted a paw, about to end the kit's life, when a darker motive suddenly washed over her. A smirk spread on the black she-cat's face as she stared at the shivering kit in front of her.

"Venom?" Feather's voice rang through the den; the silver cat had come back to check on her, seeing that her leader hadn't come out with the rest of the patrol. "Everything okay?"

"Of course."

"Is that a kit?" Feather's paw steps were slow as she approached. She glanced sideways at the black she-cat, as if expecting Venom to order her to kill it; no cat liked killing kits.

"Indeed. And I shall be taking her in."

~~~

hi all! here's the second chapter!! what did you think? what plans do you think venom has for the kit?

also! i hope the flashback to present time wasn't too confusing! the top is continuing the past time from the last chapter, and bottom half is present time. let me know if you have any questions!

thanks for reading!

~ lily
~~~

chapter 3 || p

storm

~~~

"Taking her in?" Feather spoke, her voice laced with confusion.

Venom knew why; she only ever recruited cats that knew how to hunt and fight, leaving the kits to die. The black she-cat never saw any use in kits. They were just mewling creatures that didn't provide any help. But now, as she gazed at the small gray she-kit, Venom felt a new feeling spark inside her. No, it wasn't love - not even close - rather a feeling of interest towards the kit. And not one of good desire.

"But... why? We don't have any nursing queens," Feather meowed. "No she-cat will have the milk to take care of this kit." Almost all the cats in PeaceClan didn't have interest in settling down and having kits.

Venom flicked her tail dismissively. "She'll grow on mushed prey, then."

Feather still looked bewildered. "I just don't see why you want to take this kit home with us. It can't provide us with any sort of help, only trouble."

The black she-cat drew to her full height, towering over the silver hunter, lashing her tail. "And you don't need to know my reasoning. I don't need to explain myself to you, and you have no right to challenge me. Bring the kit."

The order was final. Venom whipped around and stalked out of the den, where the rest of the patrol was waiting. Feather appeared a few moments later, carrying the gray she-kit in her jaws. At the sight of this, most of the cats widened their eyes with utter surprise.
~~~

Venom didn't bother explaining. She didn't need to. No cat challenged her. With a twitch of her ears, she led the way back to PeaceClan's camp. All her cats filed in a line after her obediently, and a satisfied smirk twitched its way onto her face.

No, she wasn't nice to her cats. She didn't need to be. That was so much effort. Why be kind to them and earn their loyalty the hard way when she could just install fear into their minds? Her cats weren't loyal to her - they were *fearful* of her. And fear was a *much* stronger emotion than loyalty.

The trip back was silent. Every cat's mind seemed to be pondering over the gray kit that was carried by Feather, but none of them dared to speak out. Turning sharply around a bush, Venom led her patrol into PeaceClan's camp.

Gazing around at the camp, the black she-cat felt a flicker of pride fly through her. The camp was located in a small valley inside the forest - a dip in the ground. It was surrounded by bushes, hard to spot; one might accidently trip inside and find themselves surrounded by fierce warriors. And, if one was unlucky, they might fall into the Highclaw den.

The Highclaws, Venom's most skilled warriors, lived in a thicket; branches of fallen trees and bushes weaved together to make a strong, sturdy den. The Middleclaw den was behind a large fallen tree. Branches and twigs were weaved around at the top to create a roof. As for the Lowclaws, they were situated in a wide hollow in a tree. The hollow had been dug out a little at the ground to make some more room, with a bush in front of it to block out the winds. The apprentices' den was a bush, tucked away at the corner of the valley. The Healers den was a tree hollow, similar to the Lowclaw den, but a little smaller. As for the elders' den and nursery...

Venom flicked her tail. She hadn't seen a need for either of those dens. Her opinions on kits hadn't changed since they found the gray she-kit in the den, despite her decision. As for elders, PeaceClan cats didn't need to "retire", as one would in WarClan. Painful memories flashed through Venom's mind as she thought of her former Clan, but she pushed it all away firmly. Cats in WarClan needed to retire because of how harsh the Clan was. They needed a break from it

when they grew old. But not in PeaceClan. PeaceClan cats didn't need a break from the life they had now. It was already peaceful and perfect. That, Venom was sure of.

"Venom?" Feather approached the black she-cat hesitantly. "Where should I put this kit?"

That's right. No nursery meant no place to keep the kit.

"In my den." Venom spoke after a long while of hesitation. "She can live there until she's ready to become an apprentice. Put her in my nest. I'll have another one made for her later."

Surprise flared in Feather's eyes. No cat other than Venom was allowed in there, unless given permission like she just had been, of course. The black she-cat twitched her pelt impatiently, and the silver hunter snapped out of her shock and raced down the hill towards the boulder that made Venom's den.

Venom's den was a tall boulder with a crack inside. Once one slipped through, they would find themselves in a decently sized cave. The cave had walls, separating the den into different rooms. Venom's nest was tucked at the end of the den, hidden by a rocky wall. She liked the den because it let little light through, setting a dark mood.

"You're all dismissed for prey." Venom addressed the patrol before making her way down the hill to the boulder. In a couple of leaps, she'd reached the top, sitting down regally and letting out a yowl. "Every cat of PeaceClan, please join me at the Boulder for a meeting!"

Cats swarmed from everywhere, out of their dens and away from prey-piles (each rank had their own pile of prey), bounding towards the boulder. Feather had now exited from Venom's den, joining her Clanmates at the foot of the large rock.

"Today, we have killed Hawk and Dove! We have brought upon them the punishment that they deserve!"

Cheers rang from the cats below her, but Venom noticed fear in

their tones. She didn't mind that. She didn't mind that at all. If anything, it *pleased* her.

"They have died, but they've left behind a kit." Venom watched as several cats leaned forward eagerly to hear her explanation; watching Feather carry a kit into the leader's den had stirred up a lot of confusion. "I am not cruel. The kit hasn't wronged us. The kit shall live. I've decided to take her in myself, and raise her as if she were my own daughter."

This sent even a greater wave of confusion through the PeaceClan cats. Venom has never shown any interest in kits. Why was this one different?

Venom wasn't sure, either. All she knew is that when she saw the gray she-kit, a new plan had formed in her mind. Not a nice one, no, but certainly a fun one. Perhaps, though, not for the kit.

"Are there any questions regarding this?" Venom always finished her meetings with this. In PeaceClan, she wanted to give every cat a chance to voice their own opinions! *Much different from WarClan, where my father-* The black she-cat's thoughts halted to a stop. *No, no, don't think about WarClan.*

Frost, a white she-cat belonging to the Highclaw rank, spoke. "What will this kit's name be?"

Venom pondered this for a moment. "Storm," she decided. "The kit will be called Storm."

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whoo! three chapters down!

what do you guys think so far? this chapter was all just in the present, so i do hope it's less confusing! also, you guys don't have to agree with venom's actions!

she's a villain, and her mind's a little... off. for example, her thinking that everyone's life in peaceclan is peaceful when she brings her cats out to kill others & inflicts fear in them, and her giving "every cat a chance to voice their own opinions" when
~~~

shutting feather down about the kit. quite conflicting, no?

thank you all for almost 100 views! that's crazy, haha!

~ lily

chapter 4 || f & p

death & manipulation

~~~

"LEAF," Nettle heaved, gasping for air. "It's Leaf. She- I found her body-"

Nettle's sentence broke off as Scorpion jumped to his paws, racing to where the brown tabby was standing at the entrance of the camp. "*What?*" Panic flared in his eyes, worry brimming in his gaze.

The brown tom gulped. "I... I just found her dead body in the woods-"

"Take me to her."

Although Scorpion was only an apprentice, and Nettle a warrior, the brown tabby didn't hesitate to follow his orders. Despite the rank, the simple knowledge that Scorpion was part of Rattlesnake's family was enough to make any cat obey him, for they didn't want to cross with the tom.

That's only one of the many things Venom didn't like. She didn't like how her father ran things, like using fear to make cats listen to him. Sure, she agreed that using fear was an effective way to run the Clan, but he should at least *try* to make an effort to make WarClan cats happy.

"Venom!" Scorpion called, as groups of their Clanmates, buzzing with anxiety and worry, crowded around them. "Go tell Rattlesnake and Crow what happened! Frostbite, Shade, Pebble, come with me." With a wordless command towards Nettle, the brown tabby zoomed off, Scorpion and the warriors he'd called for running after him.

Murmurs and whispers flooded through the onlookers. Venom scrambled to her paws, her mind processing through the shock. No.
~~~

Leaf couldn't be dead. Nettle must be mistaken. Everything was going well. As far as Venom knew, there hadn't been any signs of foxes or badgers. Had the predators moved into the forest without the black she-kit knowing? If they did, they would've needed to have traveled in and found an area to settle undetected by cats fairly quickly, which Venom found unlikely.

So how could Leaf have died?

Unfortunately, Venom had a good idea.

The black she-kit bounded to her father's den. She burst inside, finding him, Crow, and Hemlock all bunched together. Crow seemed to be grooming Hemlock, and Rattlesnake was saying something to him - most likely about him being the successor.

All three cats' heads whipped towards Venom when she entered. Crow's gaze gleamed with surprise and annoyance; Hemlock looked smug at the fact that Venom had seen him being favored by their parents; Rattlesnake looked utterly furious at being interrupted.

"What?" Rattlesnake's yellow eyes flashed. "What do you want? Can't you see we're busy? Go find something else to do."

Venom took a deep breath, steadying herself. "It's Leaf," she meowed, ignoring her father's words. "Something's happened."

"Leaf?" A frown tugged on Crow's face. "Who's that?"

"The she-cat our son has been padding after," Rattlesnake responded; Venom knew the only reason the leader knew of the brown-and-white apprentice was because of the incident with Scorpion. Crow wouldn't know of this, as she didn't know about the secret.

Crow's ears flicked up in surprise. "Really? That's new!"

"No it's not," Venom meowed, retraining herself from snapping. "He's been padding after her since they were kits!" The black she-kit twitched her pelt. "But that's not the point. Leaf has just been reported to be *dead*."

Crow's eyes widened with shock, a little gasp of horror rising from her. Hemlock's ears flicked up in surprise, the smugness wiping off his face. As for Rattlesnake... Well, Venom wasn't sure what she'd expected. But she'd expected *some* reaction. Instead, her father's face was still.

"Hmm. That's unfortunate." Rattlesnake licked a paw and brought it over his ear.

Crow blinked up at her mate worriedly. "Do you think whatever killed her will come after us?"

"Don't worry, darling, we'll be okay. Leaf was off by herself, no? We're inside a Clan of fierce warriors." Rattlesnake stood up with a hefty sigh. "I'd better go take a look at this, then. Hemlock, Venom, the two of you may come if you'd like."

"Perhaps not Hemlock," Crow piped up. "It's just a little... gruesome. We don't even know how she died. I don't want him to worry or get nightmares."

"Alright. Venom, then?" Rattlesnake didn't wait for a response; he stalked promptly out of the den.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Crow demanded. "Go on."

Venom glowered at her. Unlike Hemlock, she wanted to go. She wanted to see what had happened. She wanted to know what had happened. But her mother's tone made her pelt bristle.

The black she-kit didn't bother responding. She simply padded out of the den.

~~~

VENOM PADDED OUT OF HER DEN. Morning was arriving. The sky was turning into a pink, orange color, the tips of the sun visible above the treetops. Many cats were already out and about. However, none of them seemed to be interacting with each other. Not a single one sat by another cat and shared prey or tongues. And Venom knew why. It took *a lot* of hard work to get to this stage, but she was proud of her results.
~~~

In fact, the black she-cat was beginning her daily visit.

"Frost." Venom called to the first cat she saw.

The white hunter looked up from her prey, ears tilted. "Venom! Good morning."

"Good morning." The black she-cat trotted towards the Highclaw. "May I join you?"

"Of course, of course!" Frost scooted over, offering Venom some of her mouse, which the black she-cat declined.

"How are you doing?"

"I'm doing okay!" Frost chirped cheerily. "I'm glad that we finally got rid of Hawk and Dove. They were becoming a real pain. And we had a nice hunting session yesterday, so there's plenty of prey for every cat."

Venom beamed. Well, fake-beamed. She couldn't remember the last time her smile had been out of genuine joy. "That's lovely! You know" - The black she-cat lowered her tone - "I heard Cobra talking about you yesterday."

"Oh, really?" Frost's ears flicked with interest. "What'd he say?"

Venom winced. "Nothing good, I'm afraid. He was talking about how your catches weren't anything to be proud of, as hunting's as easy as playing moss-ball. His words, not mine," the black she-cat mewed. "He was also saying that it's fighting that takes skill, and that if you wanted to prove that you're a "skillful warrior" you should take him on in a fight."

Frost's gaze whipped towards the brown-and-white Highclaw, a snarl forming on her face. "Maybe I will. That arrogant tom. He thinks that he can survive without prey? Fighting takes skill, and hunting doesn't? Let's see him try and stalk prey all day! No doubt he'd lose his patience and miss all his catches."

Venom nodded. "I'm sure. I stopped him, though, don't you worry. Hopefully nothing like that will happen again." She climbed to her

paws. "Enjoy your mouse!" With that, she padded away.

And that was Venom's daily visits. She'd visit every single one of her cats and whisper similar lies into their ears. They'd trust none of their Clanmates. They wouldn't rely on each other. The only cat they could rely on was her.

With a satisfied smirk, Venom continued her daily visit.

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hi!! sorry about the terrible transition at the beginning. i racked my brains and that was all i could come up with, haha. thoughts on this chapter? thoughts on venom?

i'm hoping that you'll be able to see some connections between her old life and present life, like how she thinks rattlesnake should try to make every cat happy; her "trying" would be asking "does anyone have any questions?" at the end of the meetings. let me know if i need to do a better job on that, i'd love some feedback!

thank you for reading!

~ lily
~~~

chapter 5 || p & f

the fake tale

~~~

Sunhigh had settled by the time Venom had finished visiting all of her Clanmates. Needless to say, they were a lot more agitated with one another by the time the black she-cat retreated to her den.

Manipulation?

No, Venom didn't do that. She didn't manipulate any of her Clanmates. She wouldn't. That's mean. Sure, what she was spreading was lies, but truly, she was *helping*. She was doing them a favor.

Firstly, who knows what other cats truly were thinking? What she was saying could very well be the truth. Secondly - and most importantly - Venom was giving her Clanmates a cat they could rely on during all times: her. By doing such, she'd assured them that they could always come to her for anything they needed, and put their utmost trust in their leader. How nice was that?

This was one of the steps the black she-cat was taking to make PeaceClan a lovely place to live.

Venom wished she had some cat to rely on as such. To put all her trust in. But no, that was simply impossible. Not after all that's happened...

The black she-cat winced, shaking her head. *No, no, forget the past. The present and future are much more important.*

Speaking of the present and future...

Venom's gaze landed on the gray she-kit. Storm. PeaceClan's newest member.
~~~

Storm was awake now, green eyes wide and full of confusion, attention darting from one side of the den to the other. She'd been unconscious ever since Venom found her. The she-cat's best guess as to why was because Storm's parents had shoved her under the moss, perhaps a little too hard, and with all that was going on, it being too overwhelming for the gray she-kit's tiny mind, Storm passed out.

"Good afternoon." Venom shifted her paws. How long ago was it that she'd last spoken to a kit? "How are you feeling?"

"I..." Storm frowned, as if trying to form words was a difficult task for her. Perhaps, at her age, it was. "Head hurts."

Venom stalked closer. "I see. I'll see if I can find anything to help with that. Hungry?"

Storm nodded, then hesitated, opening her jaws to try and say something else. "Mother? Father?"

Ah. She was asking about her parents.

Venom neared, making sure to keep her paw steps light and soft so not to startle the gray kit. A kind expression was painted onto her face as she settled herself down in the nest, curling her body around Storm's. "Your parents..." The black she-cat hesitated, watching as the gray kit's eyes widened hopefully. "I'm sorry. They're gone."

"Gone?" A look of dismay and horror painted Storm's face. "Dead?"

"No." Venom flicked her tail. "They're still very much alive." The lie slipped out of her, as easy as breathing. As the story spun in her head, the black she-cat matched her tone to sympathy, a skill she'd mastered over the last couple of years.

Confusion flickered across Storm's features. Sighing, the black she-cat gave the gray kit's head a lick before telling the story. "Your parents abandoned you. They left you at PeaceClan's borders to die."

"I... don't remember."

"Of course not! You were passed out for a day. Must've been starved and cold."

Storm still looked confused, but nodded, agreeing with Venom's words. A flicker of satisfaction flew through the black she-cat. *Good. She's agreeing with me.*

"I found you at the border," Venom continued. "I took you in. I saved you. You're a PeaceClan cat now."

"But why...?" Storm blinked. "Why parents leave?"

Venom shrugged. "I'm not sure, love. They're bad, bad cats, I suppose, leaving such a lovely kit to die." The black she-cat sighed, placing another lick atop Storm's head.

Was this a lie? Yes. But Venom was simply doing Storm a favor. The kit was too young to understand that her parents had died. She'd experienced enough already, and having just woken up, it wasn't good to spring on the news of her parents' death. It was much better to go with the story Venom had just told her.

Storm shivered. She looked upset, devastated, and confused. '*Why would my parents leave me?*' she seemed to be thinking. '*Why? I haven't done anything wrong, have I?*'

Venom could read the kit's emotions as clear as day. And she loved that.

"Love, don't worry about them," the PeaceClan leader purred. "I'll raise you, how's that? I'll teach you how to fight and hunt... Doesn't that sound like fun? Don't worry, everything will be okay."

~~~

DON'T WORRY, EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY.

These were the words that Venom repeated to herself again and again as she raced in the woods after her father. Rattlesnake, being much larger, went much swifter, and Venom often found herself tripping over her paws to try and keep up, but she couldn't bother to care. Her heart was pounding, mind was racing.
~~~

Soon, Venom heard voices. Voices of devastation. Voices of grief, of fury. Among those, she heard Scorpion's, his tone full of utter horror. She forced herself to go faster, repeating the same six words in her mind over and over. Over and over.

"Rattlesnake!" Scorpion's voice was the thing that told Venom they'd reached their destination. She'd been so focused in her thoughts that she'd barely paid attention to where she was going, just following Rattlesnake. "You're here! Good."

Scorpion looked better than Venom had thought. She expected him to be in an utter meltdown, crouched besides Leaf's body, but he kept himself well-composed. His face was stone-like, eyes showing no emotion whatsoever. The only thing that betrayed a hint of feeling was his voice. His tone...

Scorpion spotted Venom, his fur sticking up in surprise. "Why's she here?" His voice cracked, and although the black she-kit heard anger, there was more than just that. "What if the danger's still around here?" At this, his sharp green gaze turned on Rattlesnake.

The WarClan leader flicked his tail lazily. "She's going to grow up and take more responsibility. She needs more experience."

"What about Hemlock, then?" Scorpion challenged. "He's the one that's going to be the leader!"

Rattlesnake scoffed. "There's no need to scare him with this kind of stuff. A leader can just send a cat to check for him, anyways. Now, stop arguing with me. Where's Leaf's body?"

Scorpion glared at Rattlesnake, but his anger fell away, his stone-face returning once more. Giving Venom a quick lick and whispering a firm, "Stay here," he and Rattlesnake disappeared into the bushes.

Venom gazed after him. His tone sounded like he was devastated and furious all at once. But she heard something more than that. Hidden under all the layers of attempt to not let any emotion through, the black she-kit heard one feeling that made her heart shatter for her brother.

Heartbreak.

~~~

hi all! the story's getting going! i'm so, so incredibly excited!! :)

any thoughts on storm? scorpion? leaf's murderer? a lot of you guys have put some wonderful guesses already!! also, i'd really like to hear what you think of venom! i'm trying to make her seem sort of... crazy, if that makes sense? like she's saying that she's being all nice, but in reality she's being quite cruel? and i'm hoping that the flashback bits are going to explain why she turns out the way she is! let me know how good of a job i'm doing at that so far!

thanks for reading!! <3

~ lily
~~~

chapter 6 || f

break of tradition

~~~

Venom barely remembered what happened next. It was all a blur. She vaguely remembered the stench of fox from the clearing, WarClan cats hoisting Leaf up on their shoulders, with Rattlesnake padding alongside them and shooting out orders. But, she didn't pay much attention to any of that, her mind wrapped up in the agony, despair, guilt, and regret her brother's voice held each time he spoke. She didn't think that she'd ever be able to rid that from her mind.

Venom trotted by Scorpion, her father leading the way. She brushed against her brother every now and then, for comfort, but he didn't seem to notice, eyes staring straight ahead blankly. "Leaf." A small whisper came from Scorpion. "I'm so sorry." And for the rest of the trip, he remained quiet.

Sorry? Venom blinked at him. Her brother blamed himself for Leaf's death. In this moment, the black she-kit knew that Scorpion had the same suspicions of Leaf's murderer. Her thoughts were confirmed when her brother sent a swift glare at Rattlesnake, too quick for the WarClan leader to catch it.

No. Venom shook her head. *No, no, no, no, no. Rattlesnake didn't kill Leaf. Have some more faith in your father. Scorpion's just mad because Leaf's gone. Rattlesnake didn't do anything.*

Deep down, the black she-kit doubted that. Deep down, she was still suspicious of how Rattlesnake had found Leaf's death spot without asking any cat, and how he knew she was off on her own. Deep down, she knew that Rattlesnake cared deeply for his reputation, and would end a cat's life to protect it. Deep down, she still had the raging suspicion that it was her father who'd killed the brown-and-white apprentice.
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But she pushed it all away. Venom was too afraid to face it, too afraid to admit that her father actually killed a cat. Besides, even if she did come to agreement with it, what could she do? In no world would she *confront* her father. She'd just live in silence, fearing Rattlesnake. It was better this way.

A crowd had formed around the entrance of the camp by the time Leaf's body was brought back. The brown-and-white apprentice's parents, Snow and Eagle, let out a wail of anguish at the sight, rushing to their daughter's body as soon as it was set down.

Venom's gaze scanned the crowd, searching for her mother and brother. She spotted them pushing through the cats; they reached the front, joining Rattlesnake. However, Hemlock took one glance at Leaf's body, let out a soft whimper, and pressed himself to Crow's side, refusing to look up.

After taking a look at the apprentice's corpse, Venom's body snapped to do the same. She'd never studied Leaf's appearance properly before this. She'd just been thinking about her brother. But now, actually taking a good look at the brown-and-white cat... Well, it was gruesome.

One of Leaf's ears had been torn, almost ripped off. There was a claw mark running from her right eye down to her left cheek, no doubt blinding that one eye. Her claws were wrenched, paws bent unnaturally, tufts of fur missing and claw marks covering her pelt. But worse of all, her chest had been ripped out, still bleeding.

"Cats of WarClan!" Rattlesnake called for silence. "As you all now know, today we have lost one of our members, Leaf. It appears that the cause of her death was a fox, as the scent was all around the clearing. But, not to worry, I'll send out patrols to make sure that the fox is taken care of."

Venom glanced up slightly, just in time to see Scorpion's eyes flash with anger. However, the brown tom didn't say anything.

"Now would be the time that we clean the dead's body and arrange a vigil. But, I'm afraid that I'll have to announce that Leaf will not be receiving a vigil."

Although no cat spoke, Venom could feel shock ripple through them. She, too, was stunned, staring at her father in amazed silence.

"The reasoning of this," Rattlesnake meowed, "is because of the Battle of the Apprentices."

The Battle of the Apprentices. Hearing that name made Venom's stomach lurch, pulling her mind off of Leaf's death momentarily.

When apprentices finished their training, they'd battle each other in the Hollow of Blood. They'd fight until the other yields, or even sometimes, killed. The leader, observing their skills, would then arrange them in ranks accordingly, such as whether they're in Top Assassin, Assassin, so on, and if they were going to be a Killer, Spy, or Defender.

Venom absolutely hated that. It was all just so violent. Surely there were better ways to sort apprentices than make them fight each other, sometimes to their death? If she brought this up, she knew what would be told to her:

"This is a tradition set down by our ancestors. It's worked for thousands of moons. And for those thousands of moons, you've been the first one to find an issue with this."

The black she-kit had been told this when she first learned of the Battle of the Apprentices, worrying for Scorpion. But now, knowing that it was coming up soon, her stress and worry had only increased. She'd tried her best to push it aside, telling herself that Scorpion was a brilliant fighter, but now, with her father bringing it up, that anxiety had resurfaced.

"The Battle of the Apprentices is tomorrow," Rattlesnake continued.

Venom's eyes widened. *Tomorrow?* The leader normally decided the exact date, but they would normally share it at least a week before the actual ceremony. Judging by the surprised looks from every other cat, the black she-kit realized that Rattlesnake had probably just come up with the date.

The tom flicked his tail. "Why do you all look so surprised? Surely

I've already announced this. No? Well, a mistake on my end." He made it all sound so careless before barreling on. "As I was saying, since the battle is tomorrow, our apprentices, Scorpion and Ivy, need rest if they want to perform well. There is no time for a vigil."

"But Rattlesnake," Snow spoke, her voice quivering, "surely the battle can be moved? Perhaps the day after tomorrow?"

Eagle lashed his tail in agreement, and as more cats joined, raising their voices to the demand,

Rattlesnake hissed, silencing every cat with a glare. "No." His voice was cold, unsympathetic. "It can't be moved. It's tradition that the leader decides the exact date, and I've decided that it's tomorrow. No vigil." He paused. "But I'm not unfair. Leaf's body may be cleaned and buried, with a swift goodbye from every cat. Now, I need someone to volunteer to clean Leaf's body. Preferably, a cat with good knowledge of herbs."

Venom frowned. That's something else she disliked about WarClan. They didn't have a specific role for herbs. If cats got hurt, they either healed or died.

"I'll do it," Scorpion mewed, after no cat stepped up. "I don't know much about herbs, but I can try."

Rattlesnake twitched his pelt. "Very well. So it's been decided. Good day, everyone." And with that, he turned around swiftly and stalked back to his den, Crow and Hemlock trotting after him.

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hiii! what did you guys think? personally, i'm not the biggest fan of this chapter, haha. it explained some pretty important stuff, but i just felt like the writing wasn't that great! also, i have absolutely no idea how i'm going to pull this back into present time.

anyway, let me know your thoughts! specifically, i'm wondering if you have any predictions about the future. i'd love to hear what you guys think!

bye!
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~ lily

chapter 7 || f & p

apprentice to warrior

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Venom had a restless night. Her mind was filled with thoughts of the Battle of the Apprentices. Nightmares haunted her dreams, with a particular scene of the sight of Scorpion's dead body, sprawled out and bloody, his lifeless eyes staring up at her.

Don't be ridiculous, she kept telling herself. *It's rare that apprentices die during the battle.* Yet, it wasn't impossible, and that one thought kept her awake.

Needless to say, Venom was exhausted by the time the sun had risen. She felt as if she'd gotten no sleep. Alas, there was no time to get more: Crow was grooming Hemlock's pelt, giving a long lecture about how they mustn't be late, for reputation and image.

Venom didn't want to go. She didn't want to see her brother fight and get injured. She didn't want to see something bad happen to him. If she complained enough, Crow would probably allow her to remain inside the nursery, but she didn't open her jaws once to do so. Although she didn't want to see her brother hurt, at the same time she wanted to be there. What if something bad truly did happen? She didn't want to just hang back.

So, the black she-kit found herself padding at Crow's side as they made their way to the Hollow of Blood, scouting for Scorpion amongst the crowd.

"Come along," Crow meowed, angling her ears towards a boulder that rose high above the ground. "We'll sit up there."

"Wait." Venom spoke, her voice hurried and anxious. "Where's Scorpion? I want to talk to him before the event begins."
~~~

Crow flicked her tail. "Don't be ridiculous, you can talk to him *after* the battle. You're going to distract him if you talk to him before. You don't see Hemlock complaining, do you? Now, why can't you be more like your brother?" The black she-cat didn't bother waiting for an answer before she barreled on. "Now, let's go."

Sighing, Venom hurried behind her mother and brother as they made their way to the boulder. She hopped on top, shifting uncomfortably, gaze scanning the crowd to try and find Scorpion. Oh, there he was!

Venom leaned forward slightly, trying to catch her brother's attention. He was speaking with Rattlesnake, pelt bristled slightly. Scorpion snapped something, then Rattlesnake hissed back, amber eyes flaring. He was really mad.

The black she-kit scooted back again, tail-tip twitching. What were they talking about? Whatever it was, hopefully Scorpion hadn't made Rattlesnake *too* mad. Although wishing for such, Venom knew her brother had. Her father was furious. And that glare Rattlesnake was giving Scorpion - well, it was a glare of danger.

The WarClan leader hissed once more, spinning around and stalking away. Venom gulped, waving her tail wildly in some hopeless attempt to catch her brother's attention again, earning herself a disapproving look from Crow.

This time, Scorpion's head lifted, gaze connecting with Venom's. The black she-kit recognized fear, worry, and pain in his eyes; almost instantly, anxiety bubbled through her. She tilted her head, a silent question, asking what he and Rattlesnake were talking about. In reply, Scorpion gave her a tiny smile along with a firm shake of his head: *Everything's okay, don't worry about it.*

Venom nodded. If her brother said it was alright... Well, she'd trust him. After all, what could she do? Worry? That wouldn't help anything. Plus, Scorpion knew what he was doing. Probably.

"Cats of WarClan!" Rattlesnake's voice echoed throughout the hollow, silencing the chatter. "Thank you all for joining us today for the Battle of the Apprentices." Most cats remained silent, other than

a few small, fearful cheers. "Our apprentices have trained very hard for this moment. I trust that everything will run smoothly, and I'll be glad to welcome them as warriors of our Clan after." The tom beckoned the two apprentices forward.

"Ivy, Scorpion, are you ready?"

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"STORM, ARE YOU READY?"

Venom glanced at the gray she-cat beside her.

Storm had grown greatly in the past moons. Her kit fluff had fallen away, leaving a sleek, gray pelt. She'd developed muscles during her training, creating a lean, slim structure. Her green eyes had sharpened, reminding Venom much of her own gaze. Yet, despite looking the part of a fierce cat, Storm was still kind and trusting.

Particularly towards Venom.

The gray she-cat viewed Venom as a mother. She believed every word that came out of Venom's mouth, and followed the black she-cat's orders without hesitation. And look what that got her. She'd become a confident, skillful young she-cat.

Venom flicked her tail, satisfied, as she blinked at Storm. She'd done the gray she-cat a huge favor. If it wasn't for her, Storm would've died. She would be nowhere near the state she was today, healthy and strong.

The gray she-cat shuffled her paws. "Mhm. I'm a little nervous, though."

"Don't worry," Venom assured her, "you'll be fine. Just remember the training and what I taught you, okay?" Storm nodded. "Oh, and, of course, do exactly as I'd instructed."

The black she-cat glanced at the other apprentice, Lion. He should've completed this event moons ago, but she'd decided to hold him back and wait for Storm. Now, it was time for the two of them to take on the challenge.
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"Apprentices, are you ready?" When both of them gave her a nod, Venom yowled, "Begin!"

With a flash of gray and orange, the two cats took off into the woods. Yowls from the gathered crowd erupted behind them, cheering them on.

What were the apprentices doing? Well, they were completing a challenge that would make them warriors. Instead of a battle, they'd simply have to bring back prey. Depending on how much prey they'd caught in a certain amount of time, Venom would rank them. A much nicer, friendlier version of the Battle of the Apprentices. This was just another one of Venom's steps to make PeaceClan a lovelier place than WarClan.

The black she-cat ruffled her pelt proudly at that thought. If her PeaceClan cats glimpsed at life in WarClan, she was certain that they'd be extremely grateful that they lived here instead, under her careful structure of a Clan.

Life was good. All of Venom's cats followed her orders without hesitation. Storm had grown into a strong cat, and was now close to becoming a warrior! What could go wrong?

That, apparently, was not a question that one should ask, for as soon as the thought flashed through Venom's mind, a yowl pierced the air.

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hiya! sorry i didn't update in a long while. i hope you liked this chapter!! thoughts on it? i'm really curious as to what you guys think will happen in the future. let me know!

as always, thank you for reading!

~ lily
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chapter 8 || p

attack of the apprentice

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Silence. Following the yowl came utter silence, so quiet that Venom could hear herself breathing. Every cat seemed to be frozen in shock and surprise, jaws gaped as their minds processed the yowl. The black she-cat counted a total of four seconds. Then, panic set in.

Flooding, raging panic. Murmurs of worry arose from the gathered cats, spreading as quick as wildfire. Whereas once it was deafening silence, chatter now took its place. Chatters so loud, building up upon each other, more and more, until Venom felt as if she couldn't hear herself think. The yowl. A cat had yowled. For what? Help? But who? Storm? Lion? Or, perhaps a cat they'd encountered in the forest.

Just as Venom's mind began to whirl on that thought, a loud shriek popped her thought bubble. Still unable to identify who it'd come from, it left the black she-cat's tail-tip lashing with frustration. Along with this, the voices of the PeaceClan cats grew louder still. Lion's mother, Flicker, was shrilling louder than the rest.

"Was that Lion? Was it Lion's voice? Did something happen to him? Oh, great Spirits, please let him be alright!" The tortoiseshell seemed to be in a frenzy. "Some cat needs to go investigate!"

"Silence!" Venom yowled. Almost as soon as she'd spoken, a hush fell upon the cats. Breathing in relief, the black she-cat allowed her mind to work, thinking everything through and what her next steps ought to be. "Flicker's right. We need to investigate this. I shall go."

"I'll come, too," Flicker offered instantly, but was shot down by a firm glare from the black she-cat.

"I shall go *alone*."
~~~

"Alone?" A look of worry flashed across Frost's face as the white she-cat piped up. "Are you sure? There might be something really dangerous in there."

Venom lifted her muzzle. "And you think I can't handle it?" The white hunter fell quiet. "I shall only be gone for a little while, to make sure everything's running smoothly. Rose, you shall be in charge whilst I'm gone."

As the pale ginger she-cat gave her a nod, the black leader raced into the forest. She was certain that she could handle it, whether it be a fox or cat. Besides, if it was something other than that, Venom wanted to deal with it alone without any cats spectating.

The shadows of the trees flickered upon her pelt as she entered the woods. It'd been a long time since the black she-cat traveled with no companions. Speaking of which, she'd truly never gone really far *without* any cats. She'd always had at least one...

Painful memories flashed in Venom's mind as she shook her head firmly. *No, no. I am not getting sucked into a memory. I simply meant that it's been a long time since I approached could-be danger without a patrol of fighters behind me. That's all.*

Taking a deep breath and firmly pushing all the thoughts away, Venom trudged on. Her jaws parted ever so slightly as she tasted the air, trying to find the scent of Storm, Lion, or any other being that could've caused the yowl.

Before long, a scent flickered onto her tongue. Storm and Lion. Not only that, but blood. Venom's pace quickened until she was at a sprint, following the scent and rushing through the woods as quickly as her paws could carry her. Blood...

A scene flashed before Venom's eyes, but she shook it away quickly. *No. No blood is supposed to be shed during this. This will not be like The Battle of the Apprentices.* Determined, she hurried on, her paws skimming the grass.

Soon, voices traveled towards her. Storm's and Lion's. Slowing down, Venom trotted forward, ducking around a bush. There they

were, standing in a clearing, Storm on one side, Lion the other. The ginger tom's pelt was bristled, hissing, whilst Storm had herself pressed against a tree. On Storm's pelt, she bore a deep scratch on her flank, but other than that looked alright.

"This is *your fault*!" Lion growled. "If it wasn't for you..." He shook his head, lips pulled into a snarl.

Storm's eyes widened. "I'm sorry! I didn't know!"

Lion scoffed. "Regardless of whether you knew, if it wasn't for you, I'd be a warrior by now! I should be a warrior now, rather than an apprentice still having to complete the challenge! I should have been out hunting or fighting or leading patrols for the past four moons, but instead I've been cleaning dens and fetching prey! If you hadn't been here, Venom wouldn't have forced me to wait for you!" Growling with anger, the ginger tom launched himself forward.

Storm gasped as she rolled aside, just barely ducking beneath Lion's outstretched claws. "It's not my fault! Venom's just thoughtful."

"Thoughtful to you, not to me," Lion spat. "You get all these privileges because you're just lucky! You're supposed to be dead, yet Venom just picks you and now you've got such a great, fabulous life? It's not fair!"

"There's nothing I can do about it!"

Lion hissed. "You couldn't talk to her about it? Hmm? You're such a spoiled cat!"

Storm lashed her tail. "Well if you want to be a warrior so bad, why don't you go hunt and complete your challenge, then?"

"Because," Lion growled, his fur bristled, "I like revenge better." As soon as he spoke, he jumped at Storm once again.

Venom watched the scene silently from the bushes. She didn't move a single inch, just staring ahead, taking in the information that had just been presented, watching Storm yelp and duck under the ginger tom's outstretched claws. Storm didn't know how to fight. Venom had never taught her how. Yet the black she-cat didn't feel a single

ounce of worry for the gray cat's safety. Instead, her mind was buzzing, forming a plan.

As her brain ran through the words Lion had uttered, analyzing them, she noticed how interesting it all was. Lion was clearly mad at her, mad that she held him back, yet he formed his sentences to direct the blame to Storm. Venom didn't believe the ginger tom knew she was hiding in the bushes, and so then came to the conclusion that he hadn't thought carefully of his words before saying them. That was just the way of his mind. He truly believed it was Storm's fault.

How interesting. And useful.

And that was when the last piece of Venom's plan clicked into place.

"Stop." The black she-cat rose from the bushes, uttering the word just as Lion's claws were about to collide with Storm's side. Both apprentices turned, wide-eyed, towards Venom. Lion looked panicked, whereas Storm, relieved. "Come with me, the two of you. We're going to take a walk."

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so sorry in not posting for a long time!! this chapter was a bit hard for me to write, haha. i hope you enjoyed it, though! what do you think of all this? any guesses for venom's plan? hmm? let me know what you think!

thanks for reading!

~ lily
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chapter 9 || p & f

exile & battle

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Silence filled the space between the trio as they made their way through the woods. Lion's head was bowed as he stared at his paws, refusing to glance upwards, whereas Storm had herself pressed against Venom, trembling slightly as they trotted towards the gathered crowd and out of the trees.

As soon as the three cats stepped out of the forest, commotion arose instantly.

"They're back!"

"They're okay!"

"Venom! You're not hurt!"

"Lion's okay!"

"Thank the Spirits!"

"What happened?"

The PeaceClan leader angled her ears as she observed such comments. Other than generalization, no cat had bothered to mention Storm. Another confirmation that she could launch her plan instantly.

A small shadow of a smile flickered on Venom's face before it vanished. Had she really been so stupid? Had she never observed this? It had been right under her nose.

Turning her gaze towards Lion, the black she-cat watched as Flicker rushed to her son's side, fussing over him. *I ought to thank that foolish tom. Without him I'd never have realized this.* But alas,
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thanking him was the farthest thing from the leader's mind.

"Are you going to be alright on your own for a moment?" Venom leaned down, whispering softly into Storm's ear.

The gray she-cat nodded, gaze darting nervously towards Lion as if she expected the ginger tom to leap at her again. Padding away, the black she-cat leaped on top of a boulder, lashing her tail to catch her Clan's attention and address them.

"I'm sure you're all wondering what had happened in there," Venom began. "I can assure you that it wasn't what you had in mind. It was not a rogue cat, nor a beastly creature such as a fox or dog. Instead, the chaos was caused by a cat in our own midst. Lion."

Satisfaction flickered within the black she-cat as she watched the Clan's reaction. Gasps of horror, murmurs of confusion, Lion's panicked eyes, pleading, Flicker's wide-eyed gaze at her son, and best of all: Storm's trusting look. From one glance it was clear to any cat that the gray she-cat would trust Venom with her life. And this action only both confirmed and reinforced it.

Her plan was going perfectly.

Venom called for silence again. "Inside the forest, rather than hunting prey like he was instructed, Lion was attacking Storm."

"No! I-" Lion's cry interrupted the black she-cat's speech. "I didn't- I wasn't- wait, I- oh, please believe me-"

"What my son might be trying to say," Flicker meowed steadily, as steady as one can be when their kit has just been accused of a horrible thing, "is that perhaps that wasn't actually what happened?"

Silence fell over the clearing. Dangerous silence. The air was so still, as if no cat dared to breathe, sending only sympathetic looks in Flicker's direction.

"I saw the scene with my own eyes," Venom meowed quietly. "Are you suggesting that I'm lying?"

"No! Of course not! I-" Flicker cut herself off, eyes widened apologetically. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean-"

"Good." The black she-cat spoke, voice curt. "Think carefully before you speak. Now, order of business. Since Lion was attacking Storm, I have no choice but to banish him."

"*What?*" The ginger tom's ears pinned as he looked at Venom with horrific eyes. "You don't mean that!"

Venom gazed at him coldly. "Sure I do. Goodbye, Lion."

Flicker looked at Venom then her son, her eyes full of panic. But she didn't speak.

"No, please!" Lion begged. "I'm sorry! I can make it up!"

"You attacked one of our Clanmates," the black she-cat meowed icily. "In PeaceClan, we work together. We attack as one. We do not attack our own. Since you've broken our law, I have no choice but to exile you. I'm afraid you're no longer welcome in PeaceClan, Lion. Cobra, please escort him off our territory."

Lion took a step backwards, his eyes narrowing. It seems that he's come to term with the banishment. He won't be accepted back. If it were any other cat, they would've walked quietly and quickly, mumbling their apologies. But, it seems, Lion's different. A fiery spirit, he possesses. And so, when Cobra stepped forward, Lion's gaze hardened with hatred. A want for revenge.

Then, turning around, he jumped at Storm.

~~~

STEPPING FORWARD, Scorpion jumped at Ivy.

Venom held her breath, not daring to move. Her ears had pinned themselves to her head in nervousness when Scorpion and Ivy nodded in confirmation. Her pelt had trembled with worry when the two apprentices stepped into the hollow. Her heart had practically thumped out of her chest when Rattlesnake gave the signal for them to begin. Now, everything was still.
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Ivy dodged Scorpion's attack, lashing out a paw at the brown tom's pelt. Scorpion just barely managed to duck aside, sending a blow back, as Rattlesnake observed them fight.

As the two went back and forth, Venom noticed something: Scorpion didn't see to me fighting his hardest. He'd let Ivy attack then dodge, rarely retaliating with his own hits, and using light and weak blows if anything at all. Why her brother was acting like this, she couldn't figure out. Didn't he want to fight his hardest to get put in a good rank? To get back on their father's good side? Perhaps it was trauma from Leaf's death, making his want to draw blood weaken.

But that wasn't the main problem. Glancing at her father, Venom knew that he, too, noticed Scorpion's odd behavior. Anxiety for her brother bubbled in her stomach as her father stepped forward. This wasn't going to turn out well.

"*Stop!*" Rattlesnake roared.

Instantly, the two apprentices broke apart, Scorpion carrying much more wounds than Ivy.

"I'm sure you've all noticed, but it seems that my son isn't fighting as hard as he should be. Now, I'm certain he could do better than this, and I want to put him in a rank that he deserves to be in. Fighting Ivy hasn't been pushing him to show his true abilities." The leader gazed lazily at the black-furred apprentice. "You fought okay. Technique and aim could use work. You shall join the rank Assassin and be a defender."

Ivy dipped her head before scurrying away, relief beaming in her amber eyes that her part of the ritual was completed.

"As for my son..." Rattlesnake turned his cold gaze to Scorpion. "In order to have him show his true abilities, I've decided that he shall be fighting me."

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hihi! this chapter was pretty fun to write, haha. action's about to
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happen in both the flashback & present!

does anyone have any predictions about what's going to happen? if you do, please let me know, i'd really enjoy reading them!! plus any thoughts/comments you have, feel free to tell me!

feedback is welcome!

~ lily

chapter 10 || f & p

fall of the scorpion & lion

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Venom felt her jaws drop open in disbelief. "Father's going to fight Scorpion?" Her voice, which she'd meant to come out as a soft, worried whisper, was caught by the sharp ears of her mother.

"Serves him right!" Crow sniffed angrily. "After that stunt he's pulled, not fighting his hardest. Doesn't he know how utterly *embarrassing* it is for us? Especially for your father! The son of a Top Assassin and leader of the Clan, losing? I can practically hear the rumors already! And this is even more for your father. His image means everything to him, you know."

"So Father's fighting Scorpion to protest his image," Hemlock figured, "because Scorpion would try his hardest, and every cat could see how well he's holding off the leader."

"Quite right, love!" Crow praised, giving her son's head a lick. "Your father's a smart cat, no?"

"*I* don't think so," Venom muttered softly to herself. "Scorpion could be seriously injured." Her words passed by her mother and brother, both of them focusing their attention on the hollow as the fight began.

The two toms circled one another, snarling. Scorpion's pelt was littered with wounds. He possessed a limp. Rattlesnake was two times larger than the apprentice. The match up was clearly unfair! Yet, no cat spoke out against it.

Scorpion jumped first, making Venom wince softly. Not a good choice. Rattlesnake saw him coming, swiping out a paw with ease and knocking his son away, hissing.
~~~

"Come on! You've got to do better than that!" the brown tabby spat as Scorpion staggered to his paws.

Venom didn't think her heart could pound any faster. She was practically on the edge of the boulder, tail-tip twitching with anxiety. *Please, Scorpion. I know you're upset, but please put on a good show so Father won't hurt you too much!* Worry for her brother bubbled up inside of her, flooding wildly.

As if Scorpion could hear Venom's thoughts, he glanced up at her. He tilted his head and gave her a light-tipped smile, one that he'd shown before the battle had begun. She could read the message as clearly as the previous one: *Everything's okay, don't worry about it.*

Taking a shaky breath, Venom nodded back and sat down properly. Everything will be okay. Trust Scorpion.

As the light brown tom's attention refocused on Rattlesnake, he didn't waste a moment before he was leaping at the WarClan leader again. And the dark tabby didn't hesitate, either: lashing out a paw, he hit Scorpion away. It was painful to watch. Scorpion was knocked away, as if he was something as light as a leaf.

Scorpion landed on the ground with a heavy thump.

~~~

STORM LANDED ON THE GROUND WITH A HEAVY THUMP. Lion stood above her, lips pulled back into a snarl, claws slashing at her pelt. Gasps of horror arose from the gathered cats, stepping backwards. Flicker eyed her son as if she didn't even recognize him.

Yet none of them hurried forward to pull the ginger tom off.

As Venom rushed forward, she observed the entire scene with interest. *Thank you, Lion, for making my plan flow so easily.* Leaping atop the ginger tom, she grasped his scruff and lugged him off, throwing him in Cobra's direction.

"You see, everyone?" Venom lashed her tail. "Lion's just attacked Storm again! He deserves to be exiled!"
~~~

Lion hissed, his fiery glare never leaving Storm's pelt. "It's her fault! I wish that pathetic cat never joined this Clan!"

The black she-cat lifted her muzzle coldly. "Such unkind words. It's clear that you are and never will be properly fit for PeaceClan. It's best that you lumber off on your own somewhere. Do not approach our territory ever again, as my cats have my permission to attack, whether or not you're crossing the border."

"But..." Lion trailed off. "My *mother's* in this Clan! You can't forbid me from seeing her!"

Venom huffed unsympathetically. "As I've heard you claim in the forest, you're at the age of a warrior now, no? Isn't that what you're so upset about, that you should be a warrior? Well if that's the case, then you should be able to survive perfectly fine on your own without your mother. Besides," she added, glancing at Flicker, "I bet she wouldn't wish to see you anyway after this. Do you, Flicker?"

"I-" The tortoiseshell she-cat glanced from Venom to Lion, looking back and forth with panicked eyes. "He's my son-"

Venom sharpened her gaze, fixing Flicker with a look of utter danger.

The tortoiseshell hung her head. "No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't want to see Lion anymore."

Marvelous. A small smile spread on Venom's face as she faced Lion. "Cobra, please escort him out."

Lion didn't speak when the tom nudged him away. His eyes held nothing but betrayal, hurt, and pain. His head hung as he padded towards the borders. Flicker didn't look at him once whilst he went.

"Tree! Heather!" Venom yowled, calling for the Healers. "Come take a look at Storm's wounds in the Healer's den, please. The rest of you may go. Except Flicker. I'd like a word with you, darling."

As every cat moved away, the black she-cat padded towards the tortoiseshell. Flicker's eyes still didn't leave her paws, and Venom sat down besides her sympathetically, wrapping her tail around the

tortoiseshell.

"You okay?"

"I just-" Flicker's voice came out heartbroken. "I can't believe Lion would do such a thing! He was always so good, so passionate, so willing to help. And he *attacked* a cat-" She trailed off into silence, shaking her head.

Venom pressed against her lightly. "I understand it's hard to view one we love in a bad light," she mewed gently. "You think they're a cat sent from the Spirits, to help spread love in our lives, only to find out they're not quite as we'd imagined."

Flicker managed a nod.

"And it's hard for me, too," Venom continued. "Lion had so much potential. He would've made a brilliant warrior. But I can't let a cat that's already attacked a Clanmate remain in our Clan. It just wouldn't be right, would it? In fact, I think it'd be selfish to value the power of the Clan over the safety of our cats. Don't you?"

Flicker nodded again. "Y-Yeah. I do. I just... still can't believe it. And now I'll never see him again."

"Perhaps that's for the better," Venom offered. "It'd keep our Clan safe, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it be good if we could all live our lives peacefully without worrying about being injured?"

Another nod from the tortoiseshell.

"I understand you need time. I shall leave you now to think things over. You may be excused from duties for the next couple of days. If you need anything, I'm always here to talk to."

"Right. Thank you, Venom."

With a sweet nod, the black she-cat stood up and padded away.

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hey!! winter break has officially started for me! whooo! pretty
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awesome, so i thought i'd celebrate with a chapter!

quick question, are you guys enjoying the flashback or present time more? personally, i prefer present time, as flashback's pretty cliche, haha. but, it is setting stuff up for the present. i promise you guys that the two will connect!!

let me know any thoughts you have! thanks for reading!

~ lily

chapter 11 || p

the master plan

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Venom's paws touched the ground lightly as she padded towards the Healer's den. It had been a couple days after the exile of Lion, and her mind had been whirling, calculating her next move. And today was the day she decided to put the plan in motion.

"Storm?" The black she-cat poked her head into the den, glancing around for any signs of the young gray cat.

"Yeah, I'm back here."

Venom followed Storm's voice, finding her at the back of the den. Her wounds had been covered in poultice, and she looked much better than she did a couple of days ago. Yet, the black she-cat found it strange that the Healers would've put Storm all the way in the back, hidden from view. Before she could ask why, the gray she-cat answered for her.

"Flicker visits every day," Storm explained. "Therapy, I suppose. The Healers and her talk for hours."

"Oh? About Lion's exile?"

"Yeah. They ask her how she feels about it, all that."

Venom's ears flicked with interest. "And how *does* she feel about it?"

Storm winced, avoiding eye contact. "Well... She doesn't feel good. She's always quite angry during these conversations."

"Angry?" Venom's pelt twitched. "Anger directed to whom? Me, for exiling Lion?"

"Oh, no!" Storm meowed. "No, that's ridiculous, of course not. She
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thinks you did the right thing. She's angry at Lion, for acting so rashly. And..." Another wince. "She's mad at me, for the same reasons Lion was. In a way, she's proud that he got his revenge. She just wished it wasn't in this way."

"Is that so?" Venom mused. "Now, that's not very nice, is it?" The black she-cat's mind began to turn, thinking about Flicker's position. A heartbroken Lowclaw, who has little to no power. Hmm, no, Flicker would be no threat. If anything, Flicker was going to *help* with Venom's plan.

"No, I suppose not. But that's why the Healers stuck me behind here. They didn't want Flicker to feel more agitated."

A flare of satisfaction bloomed through Venom. Good. Everything was following her plan ever so perfectly.

"Wait." Storm's eyes widened with panic. "You're not going to tell Flicker what I told you, are you? She'll be even angrier at me if she thinks I tattled! I'm fine with it, honest-"

"Don't worry," Venom interrupted gently. "I won't do anything to Flicker. We'll just have to hope she comes to her senses soon. But I do understand: loosing a kit must be hard, especially knowing that they attacked a Clanmate. She's torn between loyalty to her Clan and to her kit." The black she-cat flicked her tail. "But enough about that. How are you? Do you feel comfortable enough to take a walk over to my den?"

With a nod from Storm, the two set off. It wasn't long before they'd reached the comfort and shelter of Venom's boulder; the black she-cat hurried Storm inside and towards the back, where her nest lay, with the thick rock wall to block them from view of the opening.

Now, the two were settled comfortably in Venom's nest, soft moss piled around them. It was only then, when the black she-cat watched as Storm nestled herself softly into her nest, that she spoke.

"I think it's time I tell you about my old Clan."

Curiosity flared in Storm's eyes as her gaze focused on Venom. "Old

Clan?" She paused. "I'd always thought that you used to be a rogue."

The black she-cat sighed. "If only. But no, I had an old Clan. WarClan, it was called."

"WarClan?" Storm shivered. "Sounds dreadful."

"It was. My father was the ruler. Everything he said was the law, something that the other cats must follow. He could kill one of our own Clanmates and easily get away with it. In fact, he *has*." The last part Venom spoke bitterly as painful memories rushed to the surface.

Storm looked at her with a wide, amazed gaze. "*Really*? But how could one - no, *why* would one want to kill their own *Clanmate*?"

"Power." The answer came to Venom easily, without doubt. "Everything every cat does is for power, whether that be the power to take care of themselves, the power to lead a Clan, or, in my father's case, the power to *control* a Clan."

"What about you?"

Venom sighed, giving Storm's head a soft lick like she always did when the gray she-cat was a kit. "Now, I can't lie to you, love. Everything *I* do is for power, too. The power to make PeaceClan better. The power to give all cats under my rule a happy life. Now, that's why I left WarClan. I didn't want to be part of something so bloody and selfish. I wanted to be a better leader than my father was, to improve from his mistakes."

"From what I've seen, you've done a lovely job," Storm meowed. "All the cats here seem to love you."

Venom chuckled lightly. "Thank you, love. I try to be better than my father." She paused for a moment, as if deep in thought, before speaking. "You know, something that WarClan did was that their leader couldn't be changed until they died, whether that be through battle or naturally. I don't want that, you know. As I've said, I want to make PeaceClan more, well, *peaceful*, than WarClan. I don't want the change of leader to be through death."

"So what are you going to do?"

Venom smiled. "I'm glad you asked. I'm thinking of retiring soon."

"*What?*" Storm's jaws dropped. "No, you can't retire! You have to continue being the leader!"

"Now, now, love, I'm sure there's a cat who will be able to lead PeaceClan very nicely," Venom meowed. "In fact, I believe I'm looking at her right now."

Storm's eyes, if possible, widened even more. "*Me?*"

"Mhm!" Venom hummed. "I've raised you as if you were my own kit. There's no cat I'd trust more to lead the beloved Clan I've created."

"But I don't know how to lead a *Clan*!"

Venom laughed gently. "Don't fret, love. I won't be gone. I'll still be here, helping you and guiding you. You can always come to me for questions."

A look of determination crossed Storm's face. "Alright, then. I'll lead PeaceClan to the best of my abilities."

The black she-cat smiled. A young cat, determined to prove herself, especially after a huge fiasco in which she was involved in, leading to the exile of her Clanmate. A Clan that Venom had begun and structured, each cat adoring their leader. If the leader were to back out, and hand the position to another cat, especially one as young as Storm was... Well, everything would turn to chaos.

And Venom *loved* chaos.

It had been too long of her playing the perfect leader. Years after years of careful work and planning and built up to this very moment. And now, she could have some fun. Watch everything blow up from a safe distance.

And everything would be pinned onto Storm.

But of course, none of these thoughts passed through the black she-

cat's mind. They were all hidden deep, Venom's true intentions, but never ones that she allowed herself to think. Surface-wise, she was doing a kind thing, backing away and letting another cat have the turn to shine. But she knew her real plan, even if she'd never admit to them.

Venom gave Storm's ear another lick. "Lovely."

Life was going great.

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hi!! so sorry that i haven't updated in a long time, everyone! i've been pretty busy over winter break, haha. speaking of which, how was everybody's holiday? did you do anything fun? see family?

anyway, i think this is one of the longest chapters i've written in this fanfic! it was pretty fun! i know venom's not a very likable character, but i just find ones like her so interesting. you know, ones who seem all lovely on the outside but are actually pretty insane on the inside! it was great to share her "master plan".

let me know what you thought of this chapter! feedback is appreciated! <3

~ lily
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chapter 12 || f

jaws of life & reality

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LIFE WAS GOING TERRIBLE.

Life was one of those confusing, difficult things. One of those things that no cat could possibly predict. One of those things that often caught one off guard, shooting them down as casually as breathing. One of those things that implicated grief and sorrow on all.

Life held more pain than it did happiness.

Venom was sure of that.

She couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. She stared forward blankly, trembling, wishing and praying to every spirit that her brother would just get up and leap back into battle. Surely then Rattlesnake would deem him a Top Assassin. Afterwards, Venom could breathe a sigh of relief, congratulate him, and offer him any comfort needed for Leaf's death.

Isn't that a lovely plan? That thought was pushed firmly to the front of her mind. *Yes, it is, isn't it? Come on, Scorpion, just get up and it'll all be great!*

Venom was scarcely aware of the shouts and yowls of surprise that had tainted the air. She barely noticed her mother leaping to her paws, bolting down the boulder and toward her son's side. Although she watched as her father jumped toward Scorpion's body, burying his muzzle in his chest, she hardly acknowledged it. And in no way did she process cats crowding around.

The only thought that wandered her mind was: *Why's every cat getting up? The battle still needs to continue!*

She wanted to get up and run far, far away, before some cat could
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break her bubble and bring her to reality. Because she simply couldn't accept reality. Reality couldn't be true. It couldn't. Scorpion *can't be dead.*

"Every cat!" Rattlesnake's voice boomed through the hollow. "Please, take a step back! Crow and I would like some time alone with our son!"

It's coming, Venom realized. The moment her bubble was to be broken. But she simply couldn't force herself up, too frozen in shock.

"Scorpion-" Crow's devastated wail rose. "Scorpion's *dead*!"

And that was the moment the black she-kit's bubble popped. She was hurled at a terrifying speed towards the cold, cold jaws of life and reality.

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"Do you think she's alright?"

A quiet, timid whisper filled the den. Venom recognized the voice as Light, one of her fellow nursery kits.

"No way! I mean, I haven't seen her get up from that nest in *days*." Now it was Flame, Light's littermate, who spoke. "At least Hemlock gets up once a day to eat *something*."

"That's right," the voice of Bumble, the last of the trio, mewed. "But to be fair, Venom and Scorpion were a lot closer than Hemlock and Scorpion were. Remember that Rattlesnake changed his heir from Scorpion to Hemlock when it had been Scorpion since the day he was born. There have got to be some bad blood between the two before Scorpion died."

Venom wanted to shove her ears full of moss. She didn't want to hear the words 'Scorpion died'.

These kits, she reminded herself bitterly, trying not to lash out and tell the three to shut up, *are too ignorant and young to know what death is. Lucky them.*
~~~

But they were true: she *hadn't* left her nest in days. She did remember biting lightly at a mouse that some cat had brought her, swallowing roughly, but that was all she could recall on food.

The only scenes that played in her mind again and again were of Rattlesnake sending Scorpion through the air as light as a feather, her brother's body hitting the ground, and of the last "interaction" she'd had with him: Scorpion giving her a soft smile, telling her everything's going to be okay.

But no. *Nothing* was okay.

Every cat looked to be grieving. The deaths of two bright apprentices in a row. That could take a heavy toll on any cat. All by the cause of Rattlesnake. The black she-kit allowed herself to think this way now.

Venom hadn't attended Scorpion's vigil. She didn't want to see her brother's dead body. She never had, as when he died it was crowded by cats, and in no way did she ever *want* to see it.

But from what she'd heard, there hadn't *been* a vigil. Rattlesnake insisted that he wanted to bury Scorpion alone. He wanted to be the one to dig the grave for his son and to cover him into the earth. He must be feeling very guilty; this was the first time Venom had seen her father show emotion other than anger.

Although there was no vigil, Rattlesnake had given a speech. One begging for the Clan's forgiveness. From inside the nursery, Venom had caught bits and pieces of it.

"I went too far. I shouldn't have done that. I was just... I don't know, honestly. I don't know what I was thinking. I don't know why I did that. It was completely and utterly foolish of me. I plead that one day, you all will forgive me. But, I know I don't deserve any cat's forgiveness, nor do I deserve to lead this Clan. I shall only continue to lead until Hemlock's of age, then perhaps I'll be able to pass this role to a cat more deserving." Rattlesnake paused. His voice glittered with grief. "Just know that no cat is grieving more than I am."

Venom remembered a spark of emotion peeking through her

sorrow: annoyance. What a bunch of mousedung.

But it worked. Perhaps it was because of his speech. Perhaps it was because of his reputation - his family's *good* reputation. Whatever the reason, Rattlesnake seemed to be forgiven by all, as WarClan was fiercely loyal to its leader.

And Venom wanted to let herself believe that her father truly meant his words. After all, he did seem so guilty and sorrowful that he wanted to bury Scorpion by himself. Lugging a body, digging out a grave, then filling in the grave was a lot of work to be done by one cat. It didn't sound like something Rattlesnake would do, unless he was truly feeling a strong emotion.

But on the other paw, Venom knew that nothing was more important to Rattlesnake than his reputation and his family's legacy. He wouldn't let the family secret be released, no matter what he had to do.

Leaf knew. So now Leaf was dead.

Scorpion had told Leaf. Now Scorpion was dead.

How far was Rattlesnake willing to go?

No - that wasn't even a question anymore. Rattlesnake had already *gone* that far. He had killed his own son to protect his family secret.

He was willing to go as far as he had to.

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hello! how's everyone's day going so far? two updates in a row!! pretty proud of myself, haha.

thoughts on this chapter? there wasn't much action, and i understand if it may be boring! but i think that it's still important to show venom grieving, to truly enhance the bond between her & scorpion. so i guess this could count as a filler chapter - i'm hoping to bring more action into the next one!

your opinions & comments are much appreciated!!
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~ lily

chapter 13 || f & p

perfect

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"Venom?" A soft voice breathed beside the black she-kit's ear. "Are you awake?"

Slowly, Venom's eyes blinked open. As her jaws parted into a yawn, painful memories of Scorpion's death flashed through her mind. Yes, it hurt that her brother was gone, but it hurt even more knowing that it was her father's claws who ended the tom's life. More than that, she was scared. Terrified. What if she let something slip? Would her father kill her, too?

Venom didn't want to be here anymore. Each day she lived numbly and full of fear. Why would she want to live a life that causes nothing but suffering? She wanted to leave, to go far, far away. But she couldn't go anywhere; she was only but a kit, possessing no hunting or fighting skills. She was stuck where she was.

The black she-kit's gaze focused on the cat who'd spoken: Crow.

"Yes, Mother." Even though her voice was only at a whisper, Venom could hear the heavy grief that laced it. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Nothing, other than you getting up and giving your pelt a good wash," Crow meowed. "Hurry up, now. Hemlock's already awake and grooming."

"What?" Venom mumbled. "Why do you need me up?"

Crow gave her a surprised look. "Are you joking with me right now?" When the black she-kit didn't respond, she added, "Today's your apprentice ceremony, for Spirit's sake! Now, get up!"

Venom gazed back at her, feeling shock fluttering throughout her
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belly. She'd forgotten all about it. She remembered how excited she used to be, just wishing and wishing that she could be an apprentice. Now, Venom thought that she'd like anything but to take a role as an apprentice of WarClan, to train and someday fight in the Battle of the Apprentices.

"But-" Venom stumbled to her paws. "Scorpion-" She just managed to get out bits and pieces of her thoughts. Scorpion was dead. How could any cat just move on so quickly? And having her apprentice ceremony without her older brother... She didn't like the thought of that.

Grief crossed Crow's face at the mention of her firstborn son. "I know," she mumbled softly. "But life has got to move on. Scorpion would rather you become an apprentice then mope around in the nursery, I know it." She cleared her throat, then mewed briskly, "Hurry up!" With that, Crow marched out of the den, Venom following her gloomily.

The sun beamed brightly in the black she-kit's face. Too bright. How could anything be bright after Scorpion's death? Grumbling, Venom trotted over to join her mother and brother.

Before long, the kits were groomed and washed, their pelts fluffy and gleaming under the light. Rattlesnake, checking on them quickly with a nod of approval, called for a Clan Gathering. Cats flooded out of their dens and hurried to sit around the boulder as Venom and Hemlock climbed up the rock.

Taking a deep breath, Venom lifted her muzzle and gazed at her Clanmates, her father's voice booming through the clearing as he began the ceremony.

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TAKING A DEEP BREATH, Venom lifted her muzzle and scanned her Clanmates, clearing her throat as she began her speech.

"Beloved Clanmates," Venom meowed, her voice traveling clearly through the dip from her spot at the top of the ledge. "Today I have gathered you all here to inform you all of some changes that will be
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coming to our Clan very soon."

Murmurs of curiosity spread throughout the crowd, but the black she-cat silenced it all with a flick of her tail.

"As you all may know, I come from a bloody past. My birth Clan, WarClan, switched its leaders through death. Ever since I've founded PeaceClan, I've been trying to steer its path as far away from the way WarClan was ruled as possible. And I've been pondering on the change of leaders ever since PeaceClan was founded. I don't want the transition of leader to be through death and grief. Instead, I've come up with a new way: one leader retires and chooses an heir. That heir will take over.

"So, I suppose the point I'm really trying to get to is this: I'll be retiring."

"*What?*"

Cries of confusion burst through the camp. Cats exchanged bewildered looks, pelts bristling with protest, calling out questions.

"But we've never *lived* under another leader!" Feather's high shrill, laced with anxiety, seemed to sum up the rest of the cats' thoughts well, as they all fell silent, nodding intently with agreement. "What if the next leader ruins this Clan? What if they run this Clan the way WarClan was run?"

Venom chuckled lightly. "Now, now, I trust that each and every one of you has the best interest of PeaceClan at heart. However, I do understand that power can get to one's mind. So, rest assured that I've thought long and hard about this, finally picking a cat I'm certain will do a brilliant job of leading you all."

From the corner of her eye, Venom spotted her three Highclaws, Rose, Cobra, and Frost sit a little higher. Rose's eyes were especially hopeful, as the black she-cat had put her in charge whilst she searched the forest during the apprentices' challenges.

"PeaceClan, the next cat that shall lead you will be Storm."

Silence greeted Venom's words. Every cat seemed to either be too

stunned to speak, quivering with bewilderment, or twitching with disappointment and anger. No cat seemed *pleased* about Storm's promotion.

Perfect.

The thought, created by Venom's subconsciousness, wasn't noticed by the black she-cat. Instead, she flicked her tail and called Storm up onto the ledge with her.

"But-" Frost's voice broke the silence. "She's so *young*. She's only *just* become a warrior!"

Yowls of agreement followed Frost's words.

"Exactly! She's got no experience!"

"She's going to ruin this Clan!"

"There are cats more fit to lead! Like one of the Highclaws!"

"For Spirit's sake, *I* could do a better job than Storm!"

Venom glowered at them, putting their protests to a stop. "Now, is that any way to greet your future leader?" she demanded, as if she were a mother scolding a kit. Turning to Storm, she noticed how the gray she-cat was beginning to shrink away. Satisfaction flickered through her; this couldn't have worked out better.

"Do not worry, every cat. I know you all have your concerns. But don't fret, I'll still be here. I'll still keep a watch over things." She paused, giving the last bits of her speech. "I've raised Storm like my own daughter. I'm certain that she'll be a wonderful leader."

Gazing around at her cats, Venom noticed one thing that was evident on all their faces: jealousy. She'd thought through each one of her words carefully, and the ending wasn't to comfort them: it was to provoke such jealousy.

They were jealous of Storm, because she was getting such special treatment from the black she-cat. If it were any other cat, there was no chance Venom would choose them as heir.

And deep down, they knew it wasn't Storm's fault. It was Venom's. Venom's fault for her irresponsible, biased choice. But they wouldn't dare let themselves think that, and would instead direct anger onto Storm.

And for the record: It wasn't an irresponsible choice. Venom would never make one unless she was driven to strong, strong emotions. Every word she spoke, every step she took, was carefully thought-out and planned.

Let cats think she made a favored and bad choice. Let them know it's her fault deep down, but never let them think about it.

That was the beauty of it all.

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heyyy! sorry about the stuff that kept repeating in the present half - it's basically the exact same as the last present bit. fingers crossed that moving forward, there'll be some more action!

let me know what you thought of this chapter! pretty much a filler, honestly. again, not too much action.

but, i'd like to see what you guys think storm will do & what will happen in the future! also, i'm curious, how do you think venom's downfall is going to happen? i've left just the smallest of clues in this chapter, hehe ;)

feedback is always appreciated!

~ lily
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chapter 14 || p & f

power in number

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The next few days had gone by in a blur. Venom had helped Storm settle into her den, offering to help her make a nest. The two spent all afternoon together collecting moss, bracken, and feathers, giving them a long time to talk. When they returned, the sound of disapproving murmurs of the PeaceClan cats were no mystery to Venom nor Storm.

"I can't believe that we're switching leaders this quickly. I thought Venom would remain in power for at *least* a moon more before the transition happens."

"I know, right? I'm not looking forward to Storm's reign *at all*."

"Want to bet on how horrible she'll be?"

It's crazy how cats can be so oblivious and mean. But, Venom supposed it wasn't that big of a surprise. All the cats that were now in PeaceClan hadn't come from nice, supporting backgrounds. Venom had found them and invited them to join her Clan when they were at their lowest. Many times she would have saved them from being killed or starved, done some sort of heroic deed, before inviting them to PeaceClan.

In their eyes, she was their savior. And there was no cat they'd trust more. Their mindset had been crafted and structured into one where Venom was the best cat there ever was, one that could do no wrong.

Of course, firstly, they wouldn't even want to *switch* leaders. But to switch to one that they're all jealous of, one that's received Venom's constant attention since she was a kit - well, that didn't mix well.
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Storm's head was hung by the time they'd reached Venom's den. No talk was made as the two prepared Storm's nest, just the gentle brushing of pelts of comfort from the black she-cat to the gray one.

"You'll be a great leader," Venom had reassured Storm once they'd finished. "I promise. And always come to me if you need anything, okay?"

The gray she-cat looked much more relieved, giving an enthusiastic nod.

The very next day was the switch of power from Venom to Storm. The ceremony was held, the entire Clan gathered around the ledge, grumbling, as Storm was crowned the leader of PeaceClan.

Then, it came time for Storm's first speech to PeaceClan as their leader. Before it, however, she and Venom had returned to their den, to talk with one another and give their Clan the time to chatter amongst themselves, too.

"Venom." Storm's voice came out in a soft whisper as soon as they stepped paw into the sanctuary of their den. "They don't like me."

"No, no, darling, I'm sure they do." Venom sat down besides the gray she-cat, giving her ear a soft lick. "They just need time to see and accept you as their leader. I'm sure that they'll soon love you as much as I do." Finishing her words, she gave Storm a smile.

Venom remembered the day of her brother's death vividly. She remembered the comforting smile he'd given her. Now, this was the smile that she offered Storm. *Everything will be okay.*

But there was another, deeper meaning. Her brother had assured her that everything will be alright, but *nothing* was alright. And Venom was certain that was how things were going to unfold now.

Storm relaxed, the effect of the smile reassuring her.

"Time for your speech now, darling. And remember, I'm always here if you need me."

Storm nodded, standing up, trembling with anxiety, and trotted out

of their den to face the Clan.

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VENOM SIGHED, standing up, shaking with worry, and padded into the Hollow of Blood.

"Apprentices, begin!"

The loud, echoing boom of her father's voice blasted through the hollow. Venom's pelt twitched with anxiety, trembling, as traumatic memories flooded her mind.

Why did I think I could do this?

She glanced around at the four apprentices surrounding her: Flame, Light, Bumble, and Hemlock. None had made a move, each eyeing one another.

The Battle of the Apprentices. Her Battle of the Apprentices.

After Scorpion's death, Venom couldn't do *anything* without thinking of her brother. She couldn't glance at the Hollow of Blood without trembling. She'd debated about begging her parents to let her skip out on having to participate, but the want for their praise and approval concealed it.

After Scorpion had died, Venom's only source of comfort and care had vanished with him. Because of this, afterward, she had desperately, desperately wanted her parents' attention. She wanted comfort and closure. And the closest thing she'd gotten was that moment she and her mother shared when Crow woke her up before the apprentice ceremony.

After that moment, she had tried her best to make her parents proud. Although she didn't interact much with her mentors, she woke up early and went to sleep late, spending her free time training.

And, other than the simple want of her parents' attention, she had a hopeful plan forming. Perhaps, if she showed Rattlesnake that she was worth keeping around, he wouldn't be so quick to end her life
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as he did Scorpion's if she were to mess up.

Did Scorpion even know he was going to die? Did he step into the hollow, knowing that he was never going to exit?

Those thoughts were too terrible to think about. Yet they flooded Venom's brain constantly. Instead of pondering on them, she spent her energy and attention on her training.

Yet, it didn't seem to work. Rattlesnake and Crow's attention seemed more pinned on Hemlock than ever after losing their firstborn son.

So Venom couldn't possibly bow out of the Battle of the Apprentices. Her parents would be more disappointed in her than ever. And who knows what Rattlesnake might do...

Venom shook her head, focusing on the present. She glanced around at her fellow apprentices; none of them had made a move. The crowd was growing uneasy.

Hemlock. Her gaze pinned on her brother. *Just attack Hemlock. Be careful, and show off your fighting skills. Then everything will be alright. No cat will be hurt.*

Taking a deep breath, Venom jumped at her brother, crashing into him. Hemlock yowled in surprise, twisting beneath the black she-cat as the two rolled around.

Venom was winning; she'd caught her brother off by surprise, and had pushed him down. Just as she was about to demand for his surrender, three heavy weights landed on top of her; claws dug into Venom's pelt as the cats pushed her to the ground, making her yowl in pain and release Hemlock.

Flame, Light, and Bumble.

Hemlock sprung to his paws, eyes blazing, joining the three littermates in pounding Venom.

As Venom withered underneath her, she realized why they were all attacking her. The three littermates always stuck together; they'd

never want to hurt each other. And they were much closer with Hemlock then they were her, especially after Scorpion's death, when Venom often snapped at them and ignored them.

Connections truly were important. The more cats to back one up, the better. But, no cats were here to back Venom up right now.

Fur blinded the black she-cat's vision. Everything seemed to be getting heavier. She could feel the sticky texture of blood ooze onto her pelt. She opened her jaws, yowling that she was surrendering, but no cat heard her in the commotion.

And everything was getting heavier and darker.

I might die.

Desperation seized Venom as she clawed out, snagging at whatever pelt she could find, slicing and pulling and pushing, anything to try and wiggle her way out. She felt her claws dig into a cat's pelt, along with a yowl of pain, but she refused to let go.

Suddenly, everything felt lighter. The apprentices climbed off of her - well, all except for Flame, him refusing to move; Venom stood up and shook him away easily, wincing as pain from her wounds stabbed her.

She was greeted by the horror-struck eyes of Hemlock, Light, and Bumble.

"What?"

Turning around and following their gaze, Venom's attention flicked to the ground. What she saw made her heart drop to her belly and ice spread through her veins.

On the ground lay Flame's dead body.

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hi everybody! how's your week?

some more action-packed stuff happening, hmm? i do believe this is
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my first scene in which venom's fighting in, so let me know how i did!

honestly, not that happy with this chapter, haha. might go back and re-write it some time in the future :')

feedback's appreciated! let me know what you think of venom! with these flashbacks, i'm trying to show you guys how she turned into the cat she is in the present. whether or not that excuses her actions... well, that's up to you to decide!

thanks for reading!

~ lily

chapter 15 || f

coral

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Venom couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. Panic had arisen in her, spreading as quickly as a wildfire. *Did* I *do that?* She took a shaky step towards Flame's body. *Did I kill him?* Judging by the looks the apprentices were giving her, her suspicions were confirmed.

Light and Bumble tore their eyes away from the black she-cat as they rushed to their brother's side. Their mother, Flower, let out a yowl of grief, shooting a hateful look towards Venom as she bounded towards her son.

"I..." Venom was shoved roughly out of the way by Flower, almost stumbling to the ground. She turned to her brother, mind in a daze. "I did that?"

Hemlock lashed his tail. "You did. Didn't you hear Flame begging for you to let him go?"

"I... No. I didn't. I-" *I was too focused on my own struggles.* The truth hit Venom hard. She'd been too focused on getting herself out, grabbing and digging into whatever cat she could find, she hadn't noticed Flame's condition. "I'm sorry."

"Too late for that," Hemlock muttered just as Crow and Rattlesnake rushed into the Hollow of Blood.

Everything felt as if it were closing in on her. Hemlock's judgmental stare. The hateful looks from Flame's family. The sound of them grieving and wailing. The silent shock and disbelief from the rest of the WarClan cats. Her mother and father's paw steps, echoing louder and louder as they approached, their disappointed and disapproving gaze burning through Venom.
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Panic and guilt grabbed onto the black she-cat, controlling her body. Turning around, she ran.

Irrational, but she couldn't control it. Everything was closing in. She didn't want to hear the gossiping mutters of the Clan. She didn't want to feel the loathing looks of Flame's kin. And she certainly didn't want to see or hear what her parents would do.

But most of all, she felt ashamed.

She had *killed* a cat, for Spirit's sake! Taken a life of one who she'd known almost her entire life. What kind of horrible cat would she have to be to do that?

What would Scorpion say?

She could imagine the look her brother would give her, one full of bitter disappointment. That would be worse than anything her parents could say.

Perhaps it's a good thing Scorpion wasn't here to witness all this.

Venom wanted to get as far away from WarClan as possible.

No cat called for her.

No cat yowled for her to come back.

The black she-cat's paws hit the ground, pushing herself further and further away from the territory of her birth Clan. She was done. Her life in WarClan was ruined. Gone. And she'd never return to that horrible life.

The sun was setting, its golden rays casting across the sky, before Venom finally halted to a stop, panting. She had no idea how far she'd run. She had no idea where WarClan's camp was. All she could hope was that none of her former Clanmates would be able to find her.

Venom found a bush, pulling herself beneath it, sighing in exhaustion as she settled into her make-shift nest. Guilt swarmed her as she lifted her paw, unsheathing her claws, staring at it.

I'm a murderer now.

~~~

The next morning came all too quickly. Loud birdsong chittered through the air, waking Venom up. Shame flooded through the black she-cat as soon as she woke. Taking a deep breath, she pushed the guilt away firmly.

I'm starting a new life, she decided. *I won't ever return to WarClan. I won't ever return to those tragedies. I'll find peace and happiness elsewhere. No cat I meet from now on shall ever know about what's happened in the past.*

As for the first part of her new life, Venom decided that she'd look for something to satisfy her grumbling stomach. The annoying birds that had woken her sounded fitting.

Pushing herself to her paws, the black she-cat's jaws parted, sniffing out the prey, before lining herself up in the right position to catch it. Hidden behind a cluster of bushes, her gaze was pinned onto a fat pigeon, oblivious of the danger.

Wait... Wait... Venom's crept forward. *Careful! You almost stepped on that twig! Go forward a little bit more... Okay, jump!*

The black she-cat sailed through the air, pushing off her hind legs with ease. Paws outstretched and claws unsheathed, the pigeon stood no chance.

That it, is *would*, if something else hadn't disturbed Venom.

Just as Venom was about to land her catch, a heavy weight crashed into her, pushing her away from the pigeon. Growling in frustration, the black she-cat tried snagging the bird's wing, but it was too late; chirping in alarm, the pigeon fluttered its feathers and took off.

Venom lashed her tail, spinning around to snarl at the cat that had disturbed her hunt. *Deep breaths, deep breaths. Be nice. You're starting a new life, remember? You want to make friends, unlike you did in WarClan.*
~~~

However, she must've still looked angry, for the cat spoke before Venom could.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" The cat jumped to her paws with apologetic eyes. "I didn't know that you were hunting that bird as well! I'm so sorry!"

Venom studied the cat. She looked harmless enough, with a bright calico pelt, patched with dark ginger, white, and black, along with a pair of green eyes and a black nose, looking around the same age as her. The black she-cat decided she'd attempt in befriending this cat.

"No worries. I suppose I ought to be making the same apology to you," Venom mewed. She hesitated for a moment. How does one make friends with a cat they'd just met?

Thankfully, the calico took the lead. She flicked her tail cheerfully, accepting the apology, before meowing, "My name's Coral! What's yours?"

"I'm Venom," the black she-cat replied. Another brief moment of awkwardness before Coral cut in once more.

"Are you hungry? I sure am! How about we try and catch something else together?"

"That sounds nice."

"Great! Do you have a favorite type of prey that you'd like to aim for?"

Venom thought for a moment, desperately trying to come up with something so she could keep the conversation going, but nothing popped up. "No."

"Oh, that's fine! I'm kind of in the mood for a bird, though. You okay with that?"

"Sure."

"Alrighty! Let's go!" With that, Coral gave a happy little hop and trotted into the woods, leading the way, Venom trailing after her.

I suck at this friendship thing.

~~~

hello, hello, hello! new character! what do you guys think of coral?

i'm trying for an introvert-extrovert thing with coral & venom's friendship, but i'm not exactly sure how that'll work out. i suppose venom is pretty introvert-y, as she keeps a lot of stuff to herself, but at the same time she also talks a lot in the future. so bear with me whilst i'm trying to figure this out! <3

~ lily
~~~

chapter 16 || f & p

start of something new

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"I smell a thrush!"

"Where?"

"Up ahead - behind those bushes."

Those were the last words that Coral and Venom spoke to each other before they began their hunt. The black she-cat veered off to the right whilst the calico headed left, dropping down to a hunter's crouch, stalking the prey. Taking one glance at Coral, the black cat noted the calico was right where she'd wanted her to be.

Perfect.

Venom creeped forward, shooting Coral a look, trying to communicate her strategy. It seemed stupid - after all, she'd just met this cat, there was no way she'd know what Venom was indicating - but Coral seemed to understand, hiding herself within the bushes so she'd be able to leap out and catch the bird in case Venom missed.

Everything was in position. Bunching her muscles, the black she-cat jumped. She sailed through the air with ease, but her aim was off by a little; rather than landing on top of the bird's wings, she managed to pin down only one.

The thrush let out a squawk of alarm, flapping its other wing hurriedly. Venom's grip on it was loosening. Just as she thought that her catch was going to fly away, Coral leaped out, grabbing the thrush's other wing and landing the killing blow onto the bird.

Venom scrambled to her paws. "Thanks. I thought I was going to lose it."
~~~

"No problem!" Coral meowed cheerfully. "That's what friends are for, right?"

Friends? Venom's pelt twitched with hopefulness. She certainly *wanted* to be friends with the calico, as it seems lack of was where she'd went wrong in her life in WarClan. Flicking her tail happily, she gave a nod.

"Where do you want to eat?" Coral asked. "How about in that sunny patch, over there?"

Before long, the two were settled underneath the sunshine, digging into the bird. Venom's belly growled with approval as she ate. It was only a matter of minutes before the thrush was gone, and the black she-cat let out a content sigh. It was pleasant - a full belly, no pressure, sunbathing next to a friend. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt this happy.

Plus, her mind was still whirling about the catch they'd made. It was cool to her how Coral had understood her meaning and needs with absolute ease, even though they'd just met. Venom had never experienced anything like it with another cat in WarClan.

"So." Coral struck up a conversation. "Where'd you come from? I mean, I'm not trying to be nosy, but I've never seen you around here before."

"It's alright, don't worry," the black she-cat responded. She debated for a moment, before deciding to tell Coral about her past. If she was going to finally make a friend, she wanted to be able to trust that friend. "I came from a group called WarClan, all the way in that forest over there." She waved her tail lazily in indication.

"WarClan?" Coral's eyes rounded. "I've heard stories about that! It's a really powerful Clan, isn't it?"

"Powerful? I suppose." Venom's nose wrinkled. "But the power's not worth it to have to live in that life. My father... He's the leader, and he's... Well, he's done some pretty bad stuff."

Coral's ears flicked. "Rattlesnake? Is that your father?"

"Yeah." Surprise flared through Venom. "You know him?"

"I know *of* him," Coral replied. "There's not a single cat in this area who doesn't. I've seen him before, though, when he came to visit my parents' den."

Venom blinked, confused. "Do you know why?"

"Nope," Coral mewed. "My mother took me away, so I have no idea what he and my father discussed."

"Ah, okay." Venom sighed. What had her father done? Coral's gaze was directed to her paws, face unreadable. The black she-cat's pelt twitched nervously - perhaps now would be the time to ask her what's wrong, but she wasn't too good at this friendship thing yet. So, she just decided to change the topic. "Anyway, that's why I left. I want to start a new life."

Coral lifted her head, tilting it. "Where are you planning to go?"

"I have no destination in mind yet," Venom mewed. "All I want is to get far, far away from WarClan." She paused, thinking. "Would you like to come along? I mean, I understand if you'd rather stay here, but I figured I might as well ask-"

"I'd love to come!" Coral chirped. "I want to get away from here, too. I've got no littermates, my parents are dead, and I've been by myself for seasons."

Venom's pelt twitched with sympathy. "I'm sorry to hear that."

The calico gave her a small smile. "Thanks. Well, when are you planning to leave?"

"Whenever you are."

Before long, the two cats had jumped onto their paws and had set off on their journey. The black she-cat's pelt tingled with joy as she padded at Coral's side, more than delighted to leave WarClan behind, and with a new friend at that.

Venom had never felt happier.

~~~

VENOM HAD NEVER FELT HAPPIER. It had been a moon since Storm had taken over, and she'd be lying if she said everything was going smoothly.

Storm always returned to their den at night drained and tired, looking absolutely *miserable*. She hated her time as leader, and Venom knew that. But would the gray she-cat ever quit? Nope. She was too nice of a cat to do that, afraid of upsetting Venom.

Plus, the black she-cat knew that there was pressure Storm felt from her to do a good job, to carry on her terrific reign. Because of such, so far, the gray she-cat hadn't asked Venom for any sort of advice, nor told her what was happening. But that was alright - the black she-cat didn't need Storm's reports for her to know the current state of her Clan.

Besides, Venom wasn't the least bit worried as to how everything was going to play out. Storm's pressure and refusal of asking her for advice was only going to backfire on her, and make her even more desperate. And when that time comes, when she finally folds in and asks the black she-cat for help... Well, she'll be desperate enough to do *anything*.

Now how fun was that?

And it seems that night has arrived. Storm padded into the den, weary as always, although today she seems to be debating something in her mind. And Venom easily knew what it was.

She offered the gray she-cat a sweet smile, indicating to the spot next to herself with a nod. "Come sit, darling. Let's have a talk."

~~~

hello, hello, hello! so sorry that this update took so long. it was just a difficult chapter for me to write, hehe.

anyway, i suppose that this is a bit of a filler, for there's not much action, but i think it's important, mainly for showing the development between venom & coral! i'm quite excited to write the

next chapter, though - that'll be fun.

feedback is appreciated!

~ lily

chapter 17 || p

balance of power

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Storm padded to Venom's side, plopping herself down and letting out a sigh. Instantly, the black she-cat wrapped her tail around the younger one, giving her ear a comforting lick. "What's wrong, love? You've been down for moons."

Storm pawed at the ground, her eyes looking anywhere but Venom. "I'm just... having some trouble running the Clan, that's all. I can't seem to get along with every cat as well as you do. No cat's listening to my orders... It's really hard."

A soft smile spread onto the black she-cat's face. "I know. It's not a job every cat can handle. But I have no doubt that you'll do fine. It'll just take some time for you to adjust."

"I know that, but... No cat seems to even *want* me as leader. They don't listen to orders I give, just criticize everything I do. I just don't know-" Storm sighed. "I don't want to sound ungrateful, but I could really use some help."

Venom smiled lightly. "It's okay to ask for help, not to know everything. Those are qualities of great cats."

"Right." Storm flicked her tail. "Anyway, if there's anything you can tell me - please, it'd be helpful."

"Power." Venom spoke softly, breaking the silence that had wrapped around the two she-cats after Storm's words. "You're having trouble with power."

Storm frowned. "I never thought of it that way, but yes, I suppose so."

"Then let me ask you this: What gives you power?"
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Storm looked taken back by the question, falling quiet and thinking for a long time, her mind whirling over the way she'd seen Venom lead, before finally answering. "Respect?"

Venom scoffed. "That's foolish. You gain power when you have things others love. You gain power when you are *feared*."

"*Feared?*" Storm's eyes widened, staring at Venom as if waiting for the black she-cat to say, "Just kidding". She didn't. "Really? But- none of our Clanmates seemed to be scared of you. They love you!"

"They do fear me," Venom responded. "There needs to be a certain balance between them and I. I, as their leader, can't always be thought of as a friend. I need to have them be obedient during emergencies and such, do I not? But if they always think of me as their friend, why would they listen without question? Why wouldn't they hesitate to put up an argument when I give an order?

"You *need* to show them that you're the one in charge, Storm. Otherwise, they'll never treat you as a leader."

~~~

"Hunting patrol: I want Rose to lead it. You'll be taking the other two hunters, Feather and Flicker. Hunt at the river near the Eagle Oak. Moving on, the apprentices and Healers den needs some fixing up. Sun, you'll be in charge of that. Organize a group with Vine and Cloud, and when you're finished, put up some reinforcements on the other dens. There might be a storm coming, and I want to be prepared when it does. Cobra and Grass - choose your cats for the patrol groups and go mark the borders and check for intruders." Storm took a deep breath, ears pinned against her head in anxiety as she finished her orders. "Any questions?"

Instantly, cats' began to yowl out their complaints.

"The river near Eagle Oak? Really?" Rose called, lashing her tail. "In this weather? It's leaffall, and it's going to be leafbare soon! What kind of creature would spend their time in this cold weather near a *river*? We'll barely catch *anything*!"
~~~

"We have no apprentices! Why do we need to fix up the den?" Vine demanded. "Plus, there's only faint scent of the storm. It's not coming anytime soon!"

"Exactly! Plus, we *just* fixed the Healers den!" Sun added. "There's nothing wrong with it!"

"We don't need two patrols," Cobra hissed. "We chased out a group of rogues just yesterday - chances are there isn't anything wrong."

More and more complaints began to crowd the clearing. A small, satisfied smile fell onto Venom's face as she watched everything from afar, perched at the top of a tree from across the camp, unknown to her Clanmates.

The gray she-cat was clearly in panic-mode, having no idea what to do. She wasn't fit for a leader. Venom knew that. That's why Storm was *perfect* for this plan of hers. The cats' complaints - although annoying and rude - weren't wrong. Everything they were saying had logical reasoning to it.

But Storm couldn't back down and admit that. No, as Venom had clearly told her the night before: *No matter what they say or do, even if it's correct - do not back down. Don't do things as they want. Back up your ideas regardless.*

And now, chaos was going to break. Controlled chaos. And Venom was going to enjoy every second of it.

"Can everyone just..." Storm's words were drowned by the yowls. "Let's all..." Frustration twisted across the gray she-cat's face. "*Shut up!*"

It was strange how quickly a hushed silence fell across the cats, all staring at Storm with widened eyes, as if they'd never known that the gray she-cat was capable of saying such words.

"Now that I have your attention," Storm meowed, lashing her tail, "I'd just like to remind you all who's the leader here. *Me*. Venom chose me and not you for a *reason*. Do you all not respect her, or her decision? Do you think she made a wrong choice? Frankly, I've

never seen that happen before - she's led PeaceClan well for many moons, and I'm sure she wouldn't have handed her leadership off to a cat she didn't think was capable. Any more "questions"?"

Did Storm sound egotistical? Yes. Using Venom to justify her orders - why, the black she-cat hadn't ever imagined the gray she-cat doing such, even with the path she'd set her down. A small chuckle of excitement exited Venom.

No cat spoke.

"Good. I hope that you all will start showing me some respect as your leader. If not, I'll have no trouble enforcing such." Storm lifted her muzzle. "Now, go on. Meeting's dismissed."

Cats began to file away quickly, murmuring and gossiping softly amongst themselves. Once everyone had left, Storm released a big sigh of relief, her head hanging down in exhaustion before lifting it up again, staring at the sky, as if praying to whatever being to help her. Finishing with that, she stood up and left - all her movements closely watched and observed by Venom.

Venom grinned. *Storm, you truly are perfect.*

~~~

hii! how is everyone today?

what did you guys think of this chapter? plan's in action!

and i really am curious: how do you think that venom's downfall will come? i know i've already asked this question before, but still! i'd like to know if your idea of that has changed with these chapters.

also! when venom's downfall does come, do you want her to realize her mistake and feel bad for it, or really embrace her villain side? i'm honestly having trouble deciding this bit, so i'd like to see what you guys want!

what i'm leaning towards right now (which i think best represents venom's character, although feel free to disagree) is that she realizes
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her mistake but rather than feeling bad, feels proud, and recognizes herself as a villain (like knowing she's doing bad things rather than thinking everything she's doing is right).

anyway, that was a long author's note. feedback is appreciated!!

~ lily

chapter 18 || f

new home

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"THIS PLACE IS PERFECT!" Venom's voice, laced with joy, carried clearly towards her companion as she gazed upon the clearing, her tail swishing happily.

Coral nodded in agreement. "Yeah! It's certainly beautiful."

Standing before the two stood a clearing with a small slope that led down into a dip, with thorn bushes bristling on its borders. Thick trees surrounded it, and a tall boulder stood in the center, with clusters of bushes and logs scattered around. Sure, it would take some work, but Venom was certain the two could clean it up well enough to call it home.

"I think this is what we're searching for."

The two cats had been on the road for almost an entire year now, growing closer and closer to each other every day. Coral filled that gap of lack of affection in Venom, keeping her mind off of Scorpion's death and on the possibilities in the future, urging her to be a better cat that she was before.

Coral hummed in agreement. "Definitely! Shall we take a look?"

It didn't take long before the two were speeding down into the clearing.

"Race you! Whoever reaches the boulder first gets to be leader!" Venom called as they bounded down. The latter was a joke - they had no intentions in starting a Clan or group of any sort, and just wished to spend the rest of their days together in a safe and happy place.

Panting, the black she-cat reached the rock first, tapping her nose to
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it and pulling away proudly. "I win!"

Coral scoffed playfully. "Well of course you do," she teased. "You're the one that trained in WarClan."

A brief frown tugged on Venom's face before she wiped it away quickly. Coral often made jokes about her past in WarClan - it was almost like an inside joke for the two of them - but the black she-cat wasn't sure she appreciated it. She wanted to leave her past *behind*. But, she was probably overreacting. As long as Coral viewed her as the new cat she wanted to be, it didn't matter.

"Right!" Venom chirped, moving the subject along quickly. "Oh! There's a crack - let's go see if there's anything inside."

Granted, it probably wasn't the best idea - two cats venturing into a boulder that could collapse on them at any moment, but too young or too excited to care, the they stepped inside, a feeling of awe spreading through them as they were greeted with the sight of the cave.

"Woah! Check this out." Coral's voice travelled towards Venom from the back. "There's a rock wall here!"

Poking her head around the wall, Venom found a snuggly space - the perfect size for a nest. That settled it all: they were staying.

Plans were made. Venom and Coral spent the entire afternoon finding materials to make nests, and when the sun set, the two proudly dragged their findings back, forging them into their places of rest. When all that was completed, the black she-cat offered that they hunt, and the two set off once more, splitting up this time to search for prey separately.

Venom parted her jaws as she looked for prey, her stomach grumbling softly as she padded through the dark forest. Along with her search for food, she was also scenting for cats, to see if anyone had set up their own territory besides theirs, and to try and avoid future conflict in that topic.

Everything was going well - there seemed to be no sign of any cats

claiming territory, and Venom had just found a large, plump rabbit. This would serve nicely as dinner.

Crouching down and licking her lips, the black she-cat inched forward, sliding out her claws, preparing to attack. Just as she was about to leap, a screech split the air, making Venom's fur stand up as she jumped, startled. Needless to say, the rabbit had escaped, but that was the least of her worries.

Who was that? Venom's pelt fluffed nervously. *Coral?* Her stomach flipped at even the slightest thought of her friend being in trouble. As another scream echoed towards her once more, and the black she-cat didn't hesitate to spin around and bound towards the origin of it as fast as her paws could carry her.

Panting as she reached the top of a hill, Venom scanned the valley below her, searching for Coral's cream pelt. Who she found however was not Coral, but a pale ginger she-cat, her eyes bright green with anxiety, clinging to a shaky tree branch as dogs circled below her, panting as their eyes gleamed with excitement.

Venom's pelt bristled. She hated dogs. She'd encountered a couple during her training with WarClan, and really had hoped she'd never see them again.

She could just turn away and hurry off before the dogs noticed her... but absolute guilt would consume her if she did so, knowing that she purposely left a cat in danger when she could've helped. Besides, she was a new cat now - the old her might've left, but that was where she had to improve.

Flicking her tail, Venom charged down the hill, yowling and trying to catch the dogs' attention. There was no way she'd be able to fight them off - the best hope was to run into the forest and scurry up a tree, then somehow get away that way.

The dogs turned, glancing at the new arriver, but before they had much of a chance to look, Venom jumped on one's head, scratching and biting at wherever she could. The dogs yipped and barked as they rolled over, snarling at Venom.

"Run!" The black she-cat glanced up hurriedly at the ginger one clinging to the tree branch. "Into the forest! I'll meet you there!"

The she-cat didn't hesitate; she sprinted from the tree and took off towards the woods. Unfortunately, one of the dogs took off after her as well.

"Oh, Spirits," Venom muttered under her breath, seeing as the dog closed up on the she-cat.

Giving the dog she was fighting with a hefty kick at its eyes, she pushed off and bounded towards the ginger cat, running harder than she ever had, well aware of the now angry dog chasing behind her. Reaching the pair just as the dog was about to grab the ginger she-cat's tail, she smacked its muzzle before grabbing the cat's scruff and dragging her up a tree, panting as they reached the safety of a high yet stable branch.

The dogs yipped below, obviously angry they weren't able to catch one of the cats. The ginger she-cat was trembling, clearly terrified, as she stared wide-eyed at the dogs below her.

Venom knew she had to take even further control of the situation. Pushing herself to her paws, she twitched her tail-tip, beckoning to the ginger cat. "Come on, follow me. We'll have to get away by trees. Hopefully along the way we'll loose the dogs-"

Just then, the shrill shriek of a Twoleg pierced the air as two wandered through the field, making clicking noises and releasing more calls. The dogs' ears lifted as they turned towards them and to the cats, as if not sure whether to remain or leave. Thankfully, they were spared from such decision as one of the Twolegs spotted them, marching towards the pack with a leash in its hands and clipping it to the dogs' collars, dragging them away forcefully.

"Thank Spirits for that," Venom muttered beneath her breath. Raising her voice, she addressed the ginger she-cat, "Well, we got away just in time! I guess I'll see you around."

She received no reply, waiting an awkward three seconds of silence before ducking her head and scaling down the tree, beginning to

make her way back to the newfound camp. As soon as her paws touched the ground, though, she heard a call.

"Wait!"

~~~

finally a new chapter!! after what, two months? i'm really hoping to get more chapters out soon - there's been quite a few new changes in my life, and i'm wishing that that's now settled so i can figure out more time to write!!

anyway, what did you think of this chapter? i'm happy to hear any & all opinions you may have!

have a wonderful day, and as always, thank you for reading!!

~ lily
~~~

chapter 19 || f & p

beauty of life

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Venom turned around, features drawn in confusion. "Yes?"

"Can I..." The ginger she-cat paused, choosing her words carefully. "Where did you learn those skills? To fight off the dogs?"

The black she-cat's pelt ruffled. "Oh." She didn't like talking about WarClan very much, so she made up a little white lie. "Learned them myself."

"That's so cool!"

The ginger cat's green eyes were shining with respect and adoration, even. Venom *had* just saved life, after all. And the black she-cat couldn't help but feel a prick of pride at the look in the ginger she-cat's eyes. She craved it. Wanted more. It was the look that she'd missed from her parents, a look that she oh so wanted.

"I could teach it to you, if you'd like," Venom offered.

"Oh, sure, that'd be great!" The ginger she-cat nodded quickly. "My name's Rose, by the way."

"I'm Venom." The black she-cat paused in thought. Could Coral mind...? No, she wouldn't. The cream-colored she-cat was so kind to everybody. No way she'd be upset if Venom invited another cat to live with them. In fact, along their journey, Coral herself had asked a couple cats here and there to join them.

Plus, the more friends, the better.

"Are you... Are you staying anywhere specific?"

Rose shook her head. "No, I pretty much just wander around."
~~~

"Well... In that case, would you like to stay with my friend and I?"

And just like that, Rose was following Venom back to the camp she and Coral had founded. Coral was pacing around the clearing, eyes flashing with anxiety, when the two entered.

"*There* you are!" The cream-colored she-cat spun around, lashing her tail, as she stalked to Venom. "Do you have any idea how worried I was? I thought you got mauled by a dog or a fox! Or kidnapped by a Twoleg, even. I tried looking for you, but-" She broke off, spotting Rose. "Oh, who's this?"

"This is Rose," Venom introduced, amber eyes glimmering with amusement, "and you were right, Coral, we did get mauled by a dog. Anyway, do you mind if Rose lives with us? She wants me to teach her some fighting moves."

"Of course not!" Coral passed Rose a smile. "Come on, I've caught plenty for all of us to share."

And just like that, the three gathered around in the clearing, digging into the prey, engaging in conversation and sharing laughter. Venom didn't know if she'd ever felt happier. In that moment, she realized that she did indeed enjoy living in a big group of cats, just not the one she'd been in as a kit. Perhaps she could create her own, and invite cats like Rose to join...

A smile was etched onto Venom's face the entire night as the three talked, bellies full and purrs bubbling.

Now this is truly beautiful.

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Now this is truly beautiful.

Venom couldn't stop the maniacal grin that spread on her face. But that was okay. No cat was able to see her. And that was just as she planned, crouched within her tree, gazing at her cats, smile only growing wider and wider.

All of the PeaceClan cats carried some sort of fresh wound, a
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scratch here and there. But Venom's personal favorites would have to be those of her Highclaws. Rose had a torn ear and scratched flank. Tufts of Frost's fur was missing here and there. And Cobra, Cobra's was probably the best. A wound on his cheek, a narrowly missed blow that otherwise would've taken sight from his right eye.

And how they might've acquired these injuries, one might ask. Well, the answer was simple: Storm.

Storm, the former shy kit who was the farthest thing from confrontational had brought such wounds onto the PeaceClan cats. Off Venom's advice, of course. Make them fear you. Make sure they'll never cross you. And that's what Storm did.

It worked, didn't it? Now, not a single cat spoke out against Storm's orders. Instead, they now looked at her with rounded eyes of fear.

That's what they were doing right this moment, Storm passing out the patrol orders, looking as though she had no idea what she was doing. Which, granted, she didn't. Perhaps it'd be better if she had a deputy to deal with these things. Venom could handle a deputy along with Storm. But the position of deputy was, and will remain, long gone. Ever since Coral.

There. The name Venom hadn't allowed herself to think, much less speak, now flashed through her mind. The name that drove all sorts of emotions through her, grief, anger, sadness. The name that reminded her she was, and will forever remain, alone.

And that was how she liked it.

Now, watching as Storm flicked her tail and the PeaceClan cats instantly dispersed, the gray she-cat herself instantly letting herself sag from exhaustion, one might question Venom's reasoning. Why would she push something like this onto Storm?

Well, first and foremost, Venom, of course, wanted the best opportunities for Storm. She wanted the gray she-cat whom she viewed as a daughter to experience the joys of being a leader.

Or at least that's what she told herself.

Venom wasn't dumb. She'd watched her father for years upon years growing up. She remembered the hatred and anger she felt towards them, a feeling that she was certain was shared with other cats of WarClan. Why was that? Well, simply put, Rattlesnake, for the most part, was himself too much. And his real self was a nasty, nasty character.

So, Venom decided to be nastier. Hide that character. She'd been trying to run away from it for so long, and had it worked? For a while, when PeaceClan was first founded, she thought so. But as soon as she let herself relax into a good life, that character had come and bitten her in the leg. She can't run forever. Might as well embrace it. Use it.

Let every cat of PeaceClan think of her as a friend, of someone they'd happily give their lives to save, of someone they would trust with their own life. Never let them know how wrong they are.

And that was a good life. But, as Venom previously stated, she'd watched Rattlesnake. She knew that if she took a step too far she'd mess up. Become like her father. Become hated. Loose everything she'd worked so hard to keep.

So, pass it on to Storm. Let Storm be the front, while Venom sits back and tells her what to do. Let Storm be her puppet. Let Storm bear the responsibilities should anything go wrong. And let Venom go as far as she wanted.

Might as well. What else was Storm good for? This was why the black she-cat took Storm in the first place, anyway. As far as Venom was concerned, Storm had achieved her destiny.

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hello! the lack of updates are actually quite an issue. i last posted in what, march? it's just one of those things where life got in the way, i guess. but, it's summer, and i'm really hoping to work on this book more, maybe even finish it!

we're almost at the end, anyway ;)
~~~

so, let me know what you think! i totally forgot if i stated venom's true intentions + why she took storm in as a kit in a previous chapter, hehe, so deep apologizes if that was repeated! (fairly) certain it's new, though!

alright, i'll wrap it up here! thank you for reading, and have an amazing day!!

~ lily

chapter 20 || f & p

history

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AS FAR AS VENOM KNEW, THIS WAS HER DESTINY. It was the first time she's ever felt peace and happiness. The first time she's ever thought, *I'm good at this, and I love doing it.* A sense of what she may want to do with her life. Being a leader.

Now, she'd never rule with the same fierceness as her father. No, she'd be different. First, she'd have medicine cats, in case of injuries. Now, she didn't know much about herbs, but Coral certainly knew quite a lot on the topic, and she was happy to teach her knowledge. And, most importantly, Venom would have a deputy.

She didn't want to be like her father, corrupt with power. She didn't want to be like her ancestors, who, even after being exiled, so hungry for control, returned to WarClan and regained the throne. She didn't want the spot of leader to run within one family, or to have death be a main theme of switching leaders.

So, she decided to incorporate a new position. Deputy.

The deputy would share the power, help her make decisions, and take over things like organizing patrols. And, when she dies or chooses to retire, it'd be the deputy who took over. Whoever this deputy was, she'd have to trust them greatly to continue running the Clan she'd created.

And who better to be the deputy than Coral?

Venom would trust the cream-colored she-cat with her life. Without Coral, she didn't know what she would've done, or whether she'd have any brightness in her life. Everything she had today, she owed to her friend.
~~~

And what did she have today? Well, the beginnings of her Clan, of course.

After Rose had joined Venom and Coral's group, learning new hunting and fighting techniques, helping to mark and protect their land, news spread, and more and more cats came as well, asking to join. Now, Venom had a good amount of cats, organizing them in pretty much the same system as WarClan, for she strongly believed it wasn't the system that was corrupt, it was the leader.

And, the name. The name was something Venom had pondered over a long time. Cats had suggested to just name the Clan after herself, but Venom thought that firstly, it'd be too egotistical to name the Clan VenomClan, and secondly, it sounded much too like WarClan. She wanted her new Clan's name to represent something completely different.

So PeaceClan was what she'd decided on. She wanted nothing but peace to run through the Clan, through generations and generations to come. Looking at how the Clan was now, she was certain that PeaceClan would thrive, especially with Coral as its next leader.

Speaking of Coral, after moons since Rose first arrived, the cream-colored she-cat was becoming more and more distant from Venom. This didn't strike the black she-cat as odd; she had become very preoccupied in her leader duties, so perhaps she simply didn't have the same time as she did before for Coral. But, she wanted to. She didn't want her and Coral's friendship to break.

So, when the cream-colored she-cat approached Venom one warm, greenleaf night, asking if the black she-cat would like to take a walk with her, just like old times, Venom agreed instantly. She didn't find anything to be wrong.

After all, it was just another lovely night at PeaceClan.

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JUST ANOTHER LOVELY DAY AT PEACECLAN, IT SEEMED.

At least, it started out that way.
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Beautiful birdsong awoke Venom from her night's sleep; from one glance outside, the black she-cat recognized the lovely blue sky and heavy scent of dew lingering in the camp, a blanket of blissful silence wrapped over the camp due to the PeaceClan warriors out on patrol. All except one.

Storm was sitting by herself in the center of the camp, tail wrapped around her paws, gazing up at the sky, where birds were fluttering about.

"Everything okay?" Venom asked as she approached, sitting herself down beside the gray she-cat and giving Storm's ear a lick.

"I'm an awful leader."

Venom flicked her ears in surprise, before meowing, "No, you're not. You're great!"

"How am I great?" Storm turned to the black she-cat with teary blue eyes. "I *hurt* the warriors! I hurt all the cats! Oh, for Spirit's sake, yesterday I just scratched Feather's kit and threatened to exile him only because she talked back to me. You've never done any of that! You ruled with actual peace. I'm an awful, *awful* leader."

"Listen, Storm, it's not your fault," Venom soothed. "It's *theirs*. They didn't listen to you, so now they need to accept their punishment. It's that simple. You just needed to show them that you were in charge, okay?"

Deep inside, Venom could feel herself celebrating. She'd wanted to destroy these cats' lives for so long now, she realized. How dare they enjoy their lives, carry on living in a perfect society she'd created for them, when she herself couldn't? How dare they have the lives she wished for her entire life, of peace and love. It just wasn't fair, and it was time that they had a bite of reality, Venom thought.

Life wasn't perfect. Life wasn't fair. And they needed to experience that, too.

Because indeed, Venom truly believed that she'd created this

euphoria for them to live in. And now it was time to bring it all down.

On Storm's record, of course.

"Okay," Storm meowed. "I just... I really don't want to build a relationship with them that's based off fear."

"And you won't," Venom assured. "Just keep going until they'll do whatever you say without question, okay?"

The gray she-cat dipped her head once more, before murmuring softly, "Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to be a bird?"

Venom chuckled, ruffling her pelt. "No, why?"

"I just think it'd be cool, that's all," Storm replied. "To be able to fly far, far away whenever you want. To escape. To have a new start." Her eyes turned dreamy, before instantly snapping back to its clear blue, hurriedly mewing, "Not that I would want to escape here, of course. I love it here. Everything here's great."

Venom's whiskers gave another twitch of amusement at Storm's discomfort. When she opened her jaws to reply, the entrance rustled, Grass burst inside, eyes wide with panic. "Venom! We found-"

"Talk to Storm," the black she-cat interrupted. "She's your leader now." *Plus, if she has to make a difficult decision, she'd do as I say, anyway.*

"Storm," Grass meowed, "while we were on patrol, we found a cat wandering at the borders. He says-" She gulped, turning towards the black she-cat "-that he knows you."

Venom's eyes narrowed. Who could it be? Someone from WarClan? Another name and thing she hadn't allowed herself to place much thought into, an attempt at erasing her past. How could they have possibly found her? *Why* would they be looking for her, anyway?

No, no, this wasn't fair. She'd worked too hard for this. For the

status she has now, for PeaceClan. For the unknown past that she'd carefully covered. Her mind was already racing, planning out a speech she could give to her cats when they find out that she murdered Flame, an innocent apprentice. She *couldn't* let this cat in.

But at the same time, she wanted this WarClan cat to see this. All the power she has. Everything she's built. To laugh in that cat's face scornfully, to say that she was no longer just the sister of Hemlock, but the *founder* of a Clan.

But, the decision of denying or welcoming wasn't up to her at the moment. It was Storm's choice. Venom had foolishly passed that onto the gray she-cat when Grass first arrived with this news, a decision she now found herself regretting.

Oh, well. Either way, it should be fun.

Storm lifted her muzzle, giving a sharp nod of her head. "Bring him in."

Grass turned, calling to the patrol. Dark and Cloud walked in, a cat flanked between them.

When Venom narrowed her eyes on the cat, studying and recognizing his features, she couldn't stop the bloodcurdling shriek that emitted from her jaws, echoing throughout the camp.

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hey guys!! sorry for this longer chapter, i really wanted to fit in the suspense & tension for both the flashback and the present!

anyway, let me know your guesses on what will happen in the next chapter! who do you think the visitor is? it is a warclan cat at all, or someone else? and what about in the flashback? what do you think will happen? that may be (slightly) more obvious, haha, but i'd like to know your thoughts nonetheless!

i'm predicting around 2-3 more chapters (plus epilogue) for the rest of the book. i know this is a tad shorter than most warrior cat books you'd see on this website, but i'd prefer it this way than to drag it on unnecessarily when i have no plot left, even if the plot is just venom
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blabbing on about her plan!

even though this book is ending soon, i have many more plans for future books, and even a pretty epic collab with another author! very, very excited for those!

have an amazing day, and thank you for reading!

~ lily

chapter 21 || f

me, myself, and i

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SHE COULDN'T HELP BUT JUMP AT THE OWL'S HOOT THAT REACHED HER EARS, echoing throughout the forest.

Coral gave her a sideways glance. "You alright?"

"Fine, fine." Venom shook out her pelt. "It's just..." She didn't even know *what* was bothering her. Something was offsetting, and she'd jumped at every rustle of a bush and crack of a twig.

"We can head back, if you'd like," Coral offered, though Venom detected a look of sadness in her friend's eyes.

"No, no," the black she-cat insisted, not wanting to spoil Coral's fun. "We haven't hung out, just the two of us, in so long. This'll be great."

The cream-colored she-cat beamed as she flicked her tail. "Come on. I found a cool place I really wanna show you!"

With that, Venom padded after her, following Coral deeper and deeper into the woods, farther and farther away from PeaceClan's camp. The two made conversation along the way, chatting and joking like they used to. And when the moon hung high in the sky, Coral finally stopped.

"Look!"

Venom blinked, feeling weariness and exhaustion sink onto her bones. "What?"

"Look at this boulder!" Coral chirped happily.

The black she-cat tilted her head. "You brought me all the way out
~~~

here... to see a boulder?" She could hear the yawn on her voice, sleepiness clouding her mind. "That's cool, Coral. Want to head back now? We're both exhausted, and we've got a lot to do tomorrow, so we'll need a full night's sleep-"

"Aren't you going to ask me *why* I brought you to see a boulder?" Coral interrupted.

Venom's features drew into a frown, feeling the exhaustion slip away little by little at the sound of her friend's sharp tone. "I don't really see why I'd need to. I assume it's just a cool boulder you found while exploring, Coral. Maybe a place we could turn into a den? A storage area?"

Coral barked a laugh. "No, no. That's not it. Ask me why Venom. Ask me why this boulder has any significance."

Venom felt her pelt beginning to bristle. "You're starting to scare me, Coral. Let's just head back, okay? You're tired, so let's just go back and sleep-"

"Come on, Venom." Coral lashed her tail. "Just one simple word. That's all you need to say."

The black she-cat jumped back, her ears pressed down. "Coral-"

"*Ask me*," Coral snapped. "Ask me and learn why! Learn that my father died from your father smashing his head onto a boulder, and that my father had done *nothing*, absolutely nothing, to deserve that! The only thing he ever did was be friends with a cat your father disliked and learn a secret about your family. Then your father tracked him down and killed him. Learn that when I said goodnight to my father the night before, that was the last time I *ever* spoke to him."

"Coral, I'm sorry." Venom's voice came out in a choked whisper. Her father had killed Coral's? Her mind flashed to when she and the cream-colored she-cat first met, the oddness of speaking about WarClan. "I'm so sorry, I didn't know-"

"Learn that Rattlesnake became a hated word in my family," Coral

hissed, "that even though your Clanmates were too weak to stand up to him, I'm not. That I vowed to get revenge, and I will now, by bashing the head of Rattlesnake's daughter onto a boulder, just like how my father died."

Venom's eyes widened as she realized what Coral meant. "You wouldn't." Her voice is low as she began backing away slowly, shock instilling through her body. "You wouldn't. We spent moons together, *moons*-"

"Of course, it won't be as good as killing Rattlesnake himself," Coral meowed, "but need not worry. My family are on that. We're *sick and tired* of Rattlesnake's tyranny, of him thinking that he can do whatever he wants just because he's the leader of WarClan! Well, he can mess with the cats inside his Clan, they're too weak to stand up to him, anyway, but leave *us* alone. We will get our revenge, and *every single member* of Rattlesnake's kin will be dead. My family will finish them off back in WarClan, and I'll take care of you here."

"Coral, I'm your friend," Venom tried to reason, her voice cracking. *And you're my friend. My best friend. My first friend.*

The black she-cat would trust Coral with her life. In fact, in a way, she had. She gave Coral everything, spilled everything to the cream she-cat, was completely vulnerable towards her. She'd given Coral her life, and Coral had just turned around and stepped on it.

The cream-colored she-cat's eyes were unforgiving. "And he was my father." Her tone was icy. "My father dead because he was the friend with a hated cat. Now you dead because you are the daughter of Rattlesnake. A fair trade, I'd say."

And just like that, Coral jumped onto Venom.

The black she-cat kicked out instinctively, her sadness slowly turning into anger. *I gave Coral absolutely everything. And what did she do? Turned around and stabbed me in the back.* Venom's lips pulled into a snarl. *It's not fair.*

Coral raised a paw, intending to bring it down and smash the black she-cat's head against the boulder. "Goodbye, Venom," she

whispered softly. "I'll take care of PeaceClan well for you."

Grief? Was that grief and regret Venom detected? But it was too late. The black she-cat was already angry, and when fury muddled her mind, there was no way Coral was going to leave this place alive.

Venom rolled out of the way, leaping to her paws and sending quick, powerful attacks to the cream she-cat, knocking her to the ground. She was panting, amber eyes turning into a shade of red.

"You think you can kill me so easily?" Her voice came out in ragged breaths. "Rattlesnake may be horrible, but why does no cat stand up to him? Fear. And how does he acquire that fear? His power. WarClan is powerful. And *I* trained there!" With a final blow, Venom brought her claws down onto Coral's neck, killing her.

And that was when realization came in, washing over the black she-cat like icy water.

I killed Coral.

The words repeated in Venom's head, again and again, the black she-cat's face nothing but blank horror.

I killed Coral. I killed the only cat I could trust. My only friend.

A second cat. I killed a second cat.

Venom couldn't count how long she'd been there, curled up, sobbing beside Coral's dead body, the same words running through her mind. It was only when the moon had set and sun rose that the black she-cat got onto her paws unsteadily, making a final decision.

She wasn't going to run away this time. No, she was going to stay. Each time she learned from her mistakes. This time, she'd come to the conclusion never to let another cat in ever again.

That, added together with the experience with Flame. What did that give her? Never trust another cat, but let them all trust her. Never be willing to die for them, but let them give their lives to save her.

That seemed pretty perfect, didn't it?

Venom buried Coral. She returned to camp, telling the story of a fox attack, how the fox had killed Coral then she the fox, burying both of them. She carried no scent of fox, but all the cats believed her, because why would friends lie to each other?

Venom stripped away the role of deputy, grief lumbering in her soul, limping into her den after the medicine cats patched her up, destroying Coral's nest before curling up in her own.

Coral and Scorpion both left her. The two cats she trusted and loved the most, gone.

This was it. No more friends.

From now on, it'll just be me and my shadow.

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heyyy! another longer chapter, hehe, and i'm going to predict the next one will be around the same length, too.

so, what did you think? last flashback chapter! hope this clears up some of venom's thought process in the present. i know this is pretty much a cliché confession + motive, but i thought it fit in pretty well with rattlesnake's background and all.

as always, thank you so much for reading! you guys are amazing!!

~ lily
~~~

chapter 22 || p

guess who?

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FROM NOW ON, IT'LL JUST BE ME AND MY SHADOW.

Venom remembered thinking those exact words. She remembered feeling as though she'd be now lonely forever, paired with the grief and agony from the deaths of Scorpion and Coral. The two she'd loved most had left her, and she'd never give another the power to do the same.

The two she'd loved most had left her. *That* was the biggest takeaway. Scorpion and Coral were *gone*. One she'd killed, and the other she'd seen die. They were *dead*. At least, that's what she thought.

Here Scorpion stood in front of her, a small smile painted on his face. "Hey, Venom. You've grown a lot."

Venom's jaws gaped wide open as she stared at Scorpion. "Wha-How-?" She was unable to form words; her brother who she'd believed was dead for years was now standing in front of her. Was she dreaming?

"Venom?" Storm glanced at the black she-cat. "Do you know him?"

Venom ruffled her pelt, attempting to compose herself. "Sure I do. This is my brother." She could feel the shock ripple through the PeaceClan cats, but she ignored them; they weren't important. Right now, she needed answers. "Scorpion, if you'll follow me to my den. Everyone else, please remain away, I need to have a private conversation."

With that, she led Scorpion to the boulder, slipping inside. Her brother followed shortly, meowing, "Neat."
~~~

"Thanks." Venom didn't bring him to behind the rock wall, motioning for him to sit by the entrance. When they were all settled, the black she-cat blurted, "Aren't you supposed to be dead?"

Scorpion flicked his tail. "Ah. So we're getting right to that."

Venom nodded fiercely. "Yes! I thought you were dead for years! I've mourned you for all those years!" She could feel anger growing inside her, along with fresh betrayal. Did Scorpion pretend to be dead? Why would he leave her in her grief? "You couldn't have found time to pop up and just, you know, quickly deliver the message that you were still *alive*?" Her eyes blazed. "And not even that! I *saw* Father kill you! At least, I thought he did, and-" Venom broke off, the pieces clicking in her mind. "Wait, you mean-"

Scorpion nodded. "Yes. Father and I faked my death."

Venom felt her mind flashing, bringing her to the day of Scorpion's death. She personally had never seen her brother's dead body, since Rattlesnake was covering it the day he'd "killed" Scorpion, then insisted that he bury his son's body by himself. No other cat would be with him. Had he just dragged Scorpion into the forest and pretended to do a burial?

"Why?" the black she-cat breathed.

Scorpion huffed out a sigh. "You remember when I told Leaf about our family secret, then Father killed her?"

Venom nodded. "Yeah?"

"Well, afterwards, Father thought that if I blabbed the secret to one cat, I might give it out to another. So, in other words, I was too much of a threat." Scorpion ducked his head. "He did want to kill me for real, but I suppose even he had enough of a heart not to murder his own son. We had this whole plan set up, where I would fight weakly against Ivy and then he'd step in and "kill" me."

"Wait, so..." Venom paused, shaking out her pelt, mind racing at a thousand miles per hour. She recalled her darkest memories that'd been tucked neatly away in her mind, pulling out the scene where

she'd watched Scorpion die. He'd flown through the air as light as a leaf. There's no way that was possible unless he'd purposely pushed himself to do such.

Scorpion nodded sadly. "I'm sorry."

"Why didn't..." Venom cleared her throat, attempting to form a full sentence. "Why now? Why didn't you reveal yourself to me sooner?"

"I don't know," Scorpion replied. "I guess... When you were still in WarClan, I thought if I told you, Father might harm you too. When you left... I actually didn't know anything happened until I found your trail. I followed it, but could never catch up to you. Then I lost your scent about a moon's travel from here. I spent a couple years there, hunting when I was hungry and sleeping when I was tired, but never made any permanent settle.

"Then about" - He paused, squinting, as though thinking hard - "a couple moons ago, I met this tom named Lion. He told me about this place, so here I am. Seems to have a bit of a hard grudge, though," Scorpion added with a soft chuckle.

The black she-cat nodded slowly, taking in this information, feeling her anger and surprise slowly melt away into excitement. Scorpion was here. He was alive. Her brother was still alive!

Venom blinked up at him with a wide smile. "Well, okay! I can't wait to show you around everywhere and tell you everything I've been up to!"

"Oh?" Scorpion teased. "You've been busy? Doing what, creating a Clan?"

"Oh, shut up," Venom grumbled with a roll of her eyes. "Come on, I'll show you everything!" She led her brother outside, where Storm and the patrol were waiting, trying to look like they're busy and not attempting to eavesdrop, failing miserably.

But it was okay. Venom was certain they hadn't heard anything, even if Scorpion was sat by the entrance; it was hard for sound to get in or out of the cave, and the only way they would've heard a

single word the siblings exchanged were if they were inside the den too.

Just as the black she-cat was stepping outside, the hunting patrols began to return, laden with prey. Venom gave her brother a cheeky grin. "Prepare to never have to hunt again for the rest of your life."

Scorpion flicked his tail. "You've certainly got a lot of cats under your command."

"Yup," Venom meowed happily. "In my time away from WarClan, I've learned plenty of things that's helped me to this day!"

"And what are they?"

The black she-cat twitched her ears. "Well the most important would be that there's strength in numbers and never give another cat the power to hurt you."

"Haven't you just figured out life's secrets," Scorpion teased.

As Venom gave a purr, she padded towards the center of the camp, beginning the tour. She absolutely couldn't wait to show her brother all that she'd accomplished and see a proud look on his face for her.

Making her way towards Storm, Venom realized two things.

One, now that Scorpion was here, she expected him to fill the void that both he and Coral had given her, to make everything better and sunny. To assist and support her in everything she does, be that cat she oh so desperately needed when something went wrong, the cat she was able to confide in without being judged.

Two, she was now giving Scorpion the power to hurt her, the power she vowed never to give a cat after Coral. But, to be fair, Scorpion already had it, didn't he? And if Venom couldn't trust her brother, who could she trust?

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hi!! thoughts on this chapter? plot twist (maybe)?
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let me know your predictions!! one more chapter and an epilogue, and this book will be finished!

oh, and one more thing, thanks so much for 1k views!! i appreciate it very much, along with all of you! you guys are absolutely amazing!

thank you for reading, and have a great day!

~ lily

chapter 23 || p

shadow

~~~

"Meet Storm!" Venom proclaimed happily, leading her brother over to where the gray she-cat was standing. "Our leader!"

"Leader, huh?" Scorpion meowed with a confused flick of his tail. "I thought you were leader?"

"Venom was, but she passed that role onto me a couple moons ago," Storm filled in. "She was a great leader, and I've certainly got some large paws to fill!"

Scorpion let out a soft purr. "How are you enjoying the power?" It was meant to be teasing, but the gray she-cat froze up.

"I was having some trouble with getting the cats to listen to me, but Venom gave me some tips. Helped a lot," Storm mewed softly, pelt fluffing uncomfortably at the mention of her threats onto the PeaceClan cats.

"She's doing just fine now." Venom spoke quickly before Scorpion could catch onto Storm's hesitance. Last thing she needed was to explain herself to her older brother.

"Well." Scorpion gave Storm a big smile. "I'm glad I finally got to meet the cat I've heard so much about. Lion sure blabbers a lot about you."

The gray she-cat blinked, green gaze confused. "Lion? What does he say?"

Scorpion's tail-tip twitched, realizing that the ginger tom's words about Storm were mainly negative, probably not something he ought to bring up.
~~~

Venom resisted a teasing roll of her eyes at her older brother's ignorance for mentioning Lion's name in the first place, mewing quickly, "Any of Lion's anger is my fault. I was the one who held him back and all that. It's all on me."

"Oh? But-"

"Let's move on!" Venom interrupted. It was clear that Scorpion was about to bring up how all of Lion's spite was directed towards Storm, confused as why that was when the blame was on Venom. The black she-cat wasn't in the mood to explain that, either. "I'll see you later, Storm." With that, she dragged her older brother off.

The rest of the day was spent in joy, one she hadn't felt in a long while. Being with Scorpion, knowing that he was alive, hearing his horrible jokes and small teases made everything better.

Venom dragged him around, giving him a tour, pelt fluffed with pride as she did so. She did all of this. She built a strong Clan based off of peace and friendship. She took in loners that could barely hunt and turned them into fighting machines. And she could not be happier to show all of that to her brother.

She introduced him to cat after cat, until she was certain every one of them knew who Scorpion was and would treat him with the same temper they would her. The brown tom seemed to get along well with all of them, cracking jokes and making conversation. And when the sun began to set, cats beginning to dig into prey, the air felt so much lighter, buzzing with laughter and chatter for the first time in a long while.

"Well, I'm exhausted," Venom meowed, pushing herself to her paws. "Any of you guys ready to go to sleep?" She addressed her brother and Storm, as they were the ones she was having the meal with.

"Oh, I need to speak with Cobra about the borders," Storm replied, "but you two go ahead."

"You can sleep in our den tonight, Scorpion," Venom mewed cheerfully, leading her brother into the boulder. "We'll make a nest for you, don't worry. I bet you're tired from all that traveling-" She

broke off, noticing Scorpion's unusual silence. "Scorp? What's wrong?"

"I just-" Scorpion paused, flicking his tail as he followed the black she-cat to behind the rock wall, where the nests lay. "Your Clan-"

"It's wonderful, isn't it?" Venom mewed happily.

"Yes. Of course. But-" The brown tom shook out his pelt. "What do you call this Clan?"

"PeaceClan," Venom informed him. "I try to make everything the opposite of WarClan. I wanted a Clan built off of love."

Scorpion cocked his head. "I'm not exactly sure you have that, Venom."

The black she-cat stiffened. "What?"

"I just don't think..." The brown tom broke off, shaking his head. "It's nothing. Forget about it."

"No, no, continue," Venom urged, feeling a flame of anger flicker through her. She worked so hard on making this the perfect Clan, and Scorpion wanted to insult it? Well she'd hear what he had to say.

"It's just that... Don't you think it's odd, how Storm looks uneasy every time we talk about her leadership?" Scorpion asked lightly. "And when she talks about those tips you gave her... Venom, I have a guess on what they are, and I'd very much like for the guess to be wrong."

The black she-cat's amber gaze flamed as she stared up at her brother, challenging him. "Stop hopping around the bush and just spit it out," she hissed.

Scorpion's ears pressed themselves to his head in frustration, letting himself succumb to anger as well. "Storm isn't fit to be leader," he snapped. "She isn't! Any cat can see that, and there's nothing wrong with it. But you're pushing her to do it so bad, she's willing to do anything to accomplish that task to please you. So she takes your

tips. And what are those tips? Harming the Clan members?"

Venom opened her jaws to reply, but the brown tom lashed his tail, cutting her off. "I'm not blind, Venom, *every single one* of them has an injury of some sort! Too small to be from battle, too big to be from an accident. Tell me, just how is injuring your Clanmates creating a Clan build off love?"

"They need to learn to listen to Storm. Once they learn, Storm will fit in perfectly fine and everything will be okay."

"Will it? Or will they live in constant fear and Storm in guilt?" Scorpion demanded. "I don't know about you, but I find it odd that Lion's angry at Storm for something that's clearly your fault, not to mention how all of the cats say that you come up to them every day, telling them about which cats hate them when after speaking to all of them, it's clear that none of them hate each other!"

Venom lashed her tail to hiss back, but her brother barreled on still.

"You know what I call that, Venom? You know what the world calls it? *Manipulation*. You are manipulating all of these cats for your greedy needs, whatever they may be, and it's not right!" Scorpion meowed angrily. "Especially with Storm! She's hurting these cats, and at the end of the day, it'll be pinned on her, wouldn't it? That it's *her* idea to injure them in the first place."

Venom felt rage slowly fill her body, one she hadn't felt in a long time, but very, very dangerous. Her mind engulfed, clouding her ability to think clearly. "I'd stop talking right now if I were you."

But Scorpion didn't. "PeaceClan? You call this Clan PeaceClan?" The brown tom's eyes blazed. "If anything, this Clan is *worse* than WarClan."

That was it. Venom's snapping point.

"How *dare* you!" the black she-cat shrieked, launching herself at Scorpion.

It was quick. Easy. It had been too long since she used her claws. All she could see was red, and when she stopped, when common

sense returned, her brother lay dead, his blood gleaming off her claws.

"Oh, Spirits." Venom stumbled backwards, shaking. "What have I done?"

The two cats she loved the most, dead. Both dead at her own claws.

The black she-cat turned to collect her thoughts, heaving for air. But instead of a rock wall, she came face-to-face with Storm.

The gray she-cat's green eyes were narrowed. "I heard what Scorpion said," she meowed, "and I saw you kill him."

She had been standing behind the rock wall. The realization hit Venom as she fell into her nest. That was it. Years of this, and now it was all over.

"Is it true?" That wasn't a question that needed to be asked; it was clear Storm knew the answer, begging Venom to deny it.

"Tell me it isn't," Storm mewed, feeling her fury grow by the second. "Tell me that the cat I saw as a mother wasn't using me for her own benefit, and actually cared about me. Tell me!"

Venom shook her head, too wrapped up to reply. Too wrapped up to stop Storm when she jumped on top of the black she-cat, like mother like daughter, seeing nothing but red, feeling nothing but shear betrayal.

The black she-cat didn't even try to stop her. She could feel sharp pain, her blood tainting her black fur. Her vision blurred, but she still saw Storm's green eyes, sharp with hurt, paw raised.

"I appreciate you raising me and taking care of me, Venom, but really, I'd rather it if you'd just left me to die."

With that, she brought her paw down, and the black she-cat felt herself slipping away into darkness.

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whoo! so that's it, final chapter of shadow!

big writer's block for this one. genuinely didn't know where to start with it, 'til i forced myself to just sit down and get it done. thoughts on it? venom finally got her confrontation!!

dunno if i'm going to write an epilogue, we'll see! honestly if i do, i'm honestly not sure what would happen, you know? i think it may be better to just leave it like this, i've got nothing more i want to add onto the story.

but i will be posting a chapter on what's coming next, along with an announcement, so definitely, it'd be much appreciated if you took a look!

thank you all so, so much for your support over the course of shadow! thank you for reading!!

~ lily

future projects

hey!! i'm going to be releasing an announcement with more details, but i am planning on working on two books along with publishing a book filled with random storylines & plots i've come up with and want to explore!

anyway, so here are the two fanfictions i'm going to be giving most of my attention to:

- eternal | hyacinth [published]

- bloodied rose [published]

very, very excited for both of them!! in another life's been published since january but has been on hold due to me working on shadow, and bloodied rose will be written as a collaboration between me and Euphoria_460 ! super duper eager to share these books with you guys!

again, thanks for the support on shadow! loved reading all the comments and guesses you guys had!!

bye!

~ lily

epilogue

blood will tell

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FOR AS LONG AS she could remember, Storm has had nightmares. When she was young, she loathed sleep, afraid to hear and see these dreams again. But Venom had calmed her, told her they were only a figment of her imagination. And so, Storm had gotten used to them.

Her nightmares consisted of faces and screams. The faces of a gray tom and white she-cat, who Storm could only presume were her parents. The cats that Venom said had abandoned her.

So why was it, then, that she heard their screams? Screams pleading for mercy, of their conversation right before some sort of danger arrived:

"Dove, you take Snow and run." This was the deep voice of the gray tom. "Venom's coming. Take Snow and get out of here, now."

"I'm not leaving you," the white she-cat returned. "She won't kill us. Even Venom isn't this cruel. She likes having someone to push around."

"Dove-"

"If Snow and I leave now, our escape will only make her angry. She'll kill you, then track us down later. It's all some power thing to her."

Then, of course, were their yowls as they inevitably died to the claws of... Venom.

That part always confused Storm. Why would she ever have a dream that Venom killed her parents? It didn't make sense. Her parents had abandoned her, and Venom would never do something like that.

She'd always been too ashamed to tell Venom that the black she-cat
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was the villain in her nightmares. She couldn't even imagine what Venom would say.

I'm ungrateful, Storm thought miserably. *Venom saves my life, then I make up this horrible dream about her. What is wrong with me?*

Now, the same words thundered in her head as she looked down at Venom's dead body, panting. The black she-cat's blood was on her claws. It was... everywhere. Storm had felt like she was in some sort of daze when she'd jumped and attacked Venom, overtaken by anger and betrayal. But now... *What is wrong with me?*

The gray she-cat has never known anything *but* Venom.

What was she going to do now?

Before she could figure out any sort of plan, a voice echoed through the cave. "Venom? Are you okay?"

Rose. Storm recognized the Highclaw's voice easily, still at a distance, as nobody was allowed in Venom's den without invitation.

"Venom?" came Rose's voice again, much more concerned this time.

Storm needed to do something. She needed to answer. As calmly as she could: "We're okay in here."

It sounded calm to her ears, but it must've come out much shakier to Rose's. There was only a heartbeat before the ginger she-cat was meowing harshly, "Where's Venom?"

The sound of pawsteps on stone told Storm that Rose had come in. Quickly, the gray she-cat darted forward to greet her and block off the sight of Venom and Scorpion's dead bodies, but it was too late. Even if Rose hadn't caught sight of the limp bodies, she would've seen the blood all over Storm's paws.

The ginger she-cat let out a small gasp, overtaken by complete shock, eyes wide.

Storm's tail flicked nervously as she watched Rose unmoving.

Finally, she spoke, "This isn't what it looks like."

At the sound of Storm's voice, the shock that'd paralyzed the Highclaw hunter turned quickly into anger.

"*You*," she spat. "You horrible, *horrible* cat!"

Storm took a step backwards. "Rose-"

"You killed Venom. You-!"

Before Storm knew what was happening, Rose had darted forward, grabbed her by the scruff as though she were some field mouse, and dragged her outside. The gray she-cat was thrown out of Venom's den in front of everyone, her paws covered in blood.

Rose stood above her, lashing her tail. "This cat," she yowled, "has killed Venom! She has killed the cat who we all owe our lives to, and now she deserves to *suffer*."

The camp had erupted with commotion. Shouts came from every direction and every cat, jeering at Storm.

"I always knew there was something wrong with her!"

"How *dare* she!"

"Lion should've just finished her off."

Throughout this, it was glaringly obvious to Storm how unloved she was here. Of course, her lack of popularity was something she'd always known. But she never would've expected the entire Clan to turn on her so quickly.

They don't care about why she killed Venom. They don't care about her explanation even a little bit. If anything, they're happy she killed Venom; it proves their hypothesis of her being some sort of devil cat as correct.

There was no point. No point of trying to share her side of the story, of pleading for anything.

"Let me leave," Storm murmured quietly, but Rose heard the noise.

"What?" the ginger she-cat spat meanly, as the yowls quieted around them.

"Exile me." Storm's voice came out steadier this time, and she met Rose's eyes. "You'll never have to see me again. I promise."

As cats who used to be loners, PeaceClan couldn't imagine a worse punishment than exile. Rose's lips curled back into a snarl.

"Get out."

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STORM HAS BEEN WALKING for what felt like moons. Her fur was matted and unkept. She was so skinny now that her bones poked out from beneath her pelt. She'd never truly learned how to hunt, and ate scraps that she found along the way, drinking water whenever she could find it, sleeping beneath bushes or wherever she could.

She didn't know where she was going. All she knew was that she wanted to get as far away from PeaceClan as possible. She picked one direction and headed out that way. What she was looking for, and when she was going to stop, she didn't know.

Perhaps it would be today. The gray she-cat's body was exhausted. She hadn't found food for the last few days. She had a drink of water this morning from a dirty rainwater puddle, but it was scorching hot, and she could feel her tongue drying up. Her vision was beginning to blur, and as she dragged herself to the shade of a nearby forest to lay down, she felt that she was hallucinating the silhouette of a cat approaching her.

Was she dead? Was this a spirit?

He was a black tom, she noted. From a faraway distance, despite his larger build, he looked almost like Venom. As he neared, his eyes held a striking similarity to the former PeaceClan leader's.

He wasn't friendly. Storm could tell that right away. But she had no
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energy in her body to get up and move.

"Not going to run?" The tom stopped short of the gray she-cat. "Not going to beg for your life?"

Storm forced the words out through her dry throat. "No," she all but wheezed. "Why should I?"

He blinked, looking almost amused. "Don't you know who I am? Whose territory you're on?"

Storm shook her head. A couple of heartbeats passed, and she wondered whether he would strike her or not. But when she heard nothing from him, she forced herself to speak: "Well, where am I, then?"

A small smile glimpsed upon the black tom's face, reminding Storm eerily again of Venom. "WarClan."